

Trump Names Obama Official to Head the VA

During a press conference that was, at times, highly contentious—and his first since Election Night 63 days earlier—President-elect Donald Trump announced a surprise nomination to his incoming Cabinet.

Dr. David Shulkin, who currently serves as Undersecretary of Veterans Affairs for Health Care in the Obama administration, pending Senate confirmation, will be the next secretary of veterans affairs. There had been bipartisan calls for Shulkin to complete the implementation of his efforts to fix the broken veterans' health care system, but Trump's plans for wholesale change had appeared to preclude that possibility.

During the press conference, the president-elect said he firmly believed Shulkin would be able to make the necessary changes to improve the quality of veterans' health care. With time, he added, the Trump-Pence administration would "straighten it out."

After the press conference, the transition team released the following statement from Trump:

I have no doubt Dr. Shulkin will be able to lead the turnaround our Department of Veterans Affairs needs. His sole mandate will be to serve our veterans and restore the level of care we owe to our brave men and women in the military.

Sadly, our great veterans have not gotten the level of care they deserve, but Dr. Shulkin has the experience and the vision to ensure we will meet the health care needs of every veteran. Dr. Shulkin is an incredibly gifted doctor who is using his elite talents for medicine to care for our heroes, and Americans can have faith he will get the job done right.

In his current role, Shulkin leads the nation's largest integrated health care system, which serves million veterans every year at more than 1,700 locations across the U.S. Prior to that, he served in numerous chief executive roles at Morristown Medical Center, Goryeb Children's Hospital, the Atlantic Rehabilitation Institute and the Atlantic Health System Accountable Care Organization.

Shulkin also previously served as president and CEO of Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City and the chief medical officer of the University of Pennsylvania Health System, the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University Hospital and the Medical College of Pennsylvania Hospital. He also held academic positions, including chairman of medicine and vice dean at Drexel University School of Medicine.

Shulkin, a board-certified internist and fellow of the American College of Physicians, founded DoctorQuality, one of the first consumer-oriented sources of information for quality and safety in healthcare.

"It is my honor to serve as President-elect Trump's Secretary of Veterans Affairs," he said. "President-elect Trump's commitment to caring for our veterans is unquestionable, and he is eager to support the best practices for care and provide our Veterans Affairs' teams with the resources they need to improve health outcomes. We are both eager to begin reforming the areas in our Veterans Affairs system that need critical attention and do it in a swift, thoughtful and responsible way."

Also during the press conference, the matter of the recent BuzzFeed report that has since been almost entirely debunked was discussed. The president-elect's spokesman, Sean Spicer, ripped into the shoddy reporting behind it:

It's frankly outrageous and highly irresponsible for a left-wing blog that was openly hostile to the president-elect's

campaign to drop highly salacious and flat-out false information on the internet just days before he takes the oath of office.

According to BuzzFeed's own editor, there are some serious reasons to doubt the allegations in the report. The executive editor of *The New York Times* also dismissed the report by saying that it was "totally unsubstantiated," echoing concerns that many other reporters expressed on the internet.

The fact that BuzzFeed and CNN made the decision to run with this unsubstantiated claim is a sad effort to get clicks. The report is not an intelligence report, plain and simple. One issue that the report talked about was the relationship with three individuals associated with the campaign: Paul Manafort, Michael Cohen and Carter Paige.

Carter Paige is an individual whom the president-elect does not know and was put on notice months ago by the campaign. Paul Manafort has adamantly denied any of this involvement, and Michael Cohen, who was said to have visited Prague in August and September, did not leave or enter the United States during this time.

We asked him to produce his passport to confirm his whereabouts on the dates in question, and there was no doubt he was not in Prague. In fact, Mr. Cohen has never been in Prague.

A new report actually suggests that Michael Cohen was at the University of Southern California with his son at a baseball game. One report suggests that apparently it's another Michael Cohen.

For all the talk today about "fake news," this political witch hunt by some in the media is based on some of the most flimsy reporting, and it is frankly shameful and disgraceful.

Trump added to those sentiments later, saying the release of the information appeared to come from “opponents” in the intelligence community, and that it was “disgraceful.” He said the release of details from classified intelligence briefings is illegal.

A reporter for BuzzFeed attempted to interrupt the press conference in order to ask a question, saying the president-elect had “maligned” his news organization, but Trump refused to recognize him for a question. That was one of many instances in which the president-elect expressed his disappointment with the liberal mainstream media.

During the press conference, Trump had Sherry Dillon, an attorney with the Morgan, Lewis & Bockius law firm, explain his plans to temporarily step away from Trump Organization during the course of his presidency. She explained that while the president and vice president are exempt from federal law that forbids conflicts of interest, Trump was determined to do “more than the law requires” to avoid the appearance of any conflicts.

The president-elect’s two oldest sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, will manage the company with the help of a long-time Trump Organization executive until he leaves office. All pending foreign deals were terminated, and no new ones will be initiated during the course of the Trump presidency.

Additionally, an ethics adviser is being added to the executive board, and no deals can go forward without that official’s approval. A “compliance officer” has also been hired to eliminate conflicts and to ensure there are no remaining ties between the Trump Organization and the presidency.

The president-elect also took questions about the repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as Obamacare. Noting that President Barack Obama’s signature

healthcare legislation is “imploding as we speak,” he said he could have waited to let a “catastrophic” 2017 happen to the insurance industry before he acted, saying it would have given him a mandate to put in place any system he saw fit, but he noted that would be unfair to the American people who elected him.

He said he continues to work with Congress on a plan that will repeal and replace Obamacare in short order. He said the plan will be presented as soon as Secretary of Health and Human Services-designate Tom Price is confirmed.

Trump said the actual repeal and replacement votes would certainly take place in the same week, but could happen within the same hour, depending upon how the scheduling works out. He said doing so was a “tremendous service” to Democrats, who currently “own” the failures of the existing program.

The president-elect was also asked about his pending Supreme Court nominee.

“As you know, I started out with a list of 20 people, and we met with many of them,” he said. “These were folks who all came highly recommended by the Federalist Society and [Heritage Foundation]. I will be making a decision within about two weeks of Jan. 20.” {eo}