



November 15, 2021

Emma Lewis  
American Oversight  
1030 15<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite B255  
Washington, DC 20005

\*Delivered via email to Emma Lewis at [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org)

Dear Ms. Lewis:

We received your letter dated November 9, 2021 requesting documents under the Nebraska Public Records Act. You requested communications sent by officials (Director John Hilgert, or anyone communicating on his behalf) in the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs (NDVA) regarding a postcard recruiting unvaccinated nurses. We have searched our records and have found two emails that falls within the parameters of your request. You can find them attached to this email.

Your request, while not consequential to the request for documents, references a letter from State Senator Carol Blood to NDVA Director John Hilgert. The purported letter to Director Hilgert from Senator Blood has been referenced on a number of occasions. I wanted to clarify for you that while State Senator Blood's letter may have been sent to other state agencies, to date, neither Director Hilgert nor the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs has received a letter from State Senator Carol Blood regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Jenifer Acierno  
Agency Legal Counsel  
Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs  
P.O. Box 95083  
301 Centennial Mall South, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Lincoln, NE 68509

**From:** Hilgert, John  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 25, 2021 10:00 AM  
**To:** Armstrong, Holden  
**Subject:** RE: The Washington Post Time Sensitive Media Inquiry - Seeking response to virtual and physical ads asking nurses, not requiring vaccinations

I couldn't get past the pay wall

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**From:** Armstrong, Holden <Holden.Armstrong@nebraska.gov>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 25, 2021 8:18 AM  
**To:** Hilgert, John <John.Hilgert@nebraska.gov>  
**Cc:** Bennett, Levi <Levi.Bennett@nebraska.gov>; Dare, Tyler <Tyler.Dare@nebraska.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: The Washington Post Time Sensitive Media Inquiry - Seeking response to virtual and physical ads asking nurses, not requiring vaccinations

I guess we didn't meet her deadline. The story is available here:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/08/25/nebraska-nurses-no-covid-vaccination/>

Thank you,

**Holden Armstrong**

*Communications Director*

**Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs**

PHONE 402-219-1704

[holden.armstrong@nebraska.gov](mailto:holden.armstrong@nebraska.gov)

[veterans.nebraska.gov](http://veterans.nebraska.gov) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

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**From:** Salcedo, Andrea <[Andrea.Salcedo@washpost.com](mailto:Andrea.Salcedo@washpost.com)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 24, 2021 10:06 PM  
**To:** Hilgert, John <[John.Hilgert@nebraska.gov](mailto:John.Hilgert@nebraska.gov)>; Armstrong, Holden <[Holden.Armstrong@nebraska.gov](mailto:Holden.Armstrong@nebraska.gov)>  
**Cc:** Bennett, Levi <[Levi.Bennett@nebraska.gov](mailto:Levi.Bennett@nebraska.gov)>; Dare, Tyler <[Tyler.Dare@nebraska.gov](mailto:Tyler.Dare@nebraska.gov)>  
**Subject:** The Washington Post Time Sensitive Media Inquiry - Seeking response to virtual and physical ads asking nurses, not requiring vaccinations

Good evening John,

I'm an overnight reporter with The Washington Post reaching out seeking comment from your office regarding [a letter](#) Sen. Carol Blood sent you and the governor regarding a virtual and physical ad (post card) her constituents reported to her.

The ad tries to recruit nurses and does not require vaccinations. One of the virtual ads is trying to recruit nurses at a VA Hospital. I have seen a copy of the virtual ad and the post card.

What is the state's VA office response to her letter?

Are these ads real?

Who came up with this idea and who approved it?

If the ads are real, will the state move forward with it?

The Senator has told me that as of Tuesday evening she has not heard back from the VA Director. Wanted to give you an opportunity to comment on that as well.

My deadline is 3 a.m. EST.

If I hear back from you past deadline, I will update my story with the governor's response.

Thank you,

Andrea Salcedo  
Reporter  
The Washington Post  
C:773-592-9510

**From:** Hilgert, John  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 26, 2021 9:11 AM  
**To:** Armstrong, Holden

**1.5 - Newsweek:** [Senator Criticizes Veteran Center for Healthcare Job Openings Listing Vaccines as 'Optional'](#) (25 August, Catherine Ferris, 21.2M uvm; New York, NY)

Nebraska State Senator Carol Blood penned a letter on Monday asking Governor Pete Ricketts and Nebraska's Director of Veterans' Affairs John Hilgert about job postings for registered nurses in a skilled nursing care facility for veterans. These postings noted that there are no COVID-19 vaccine requirements.

The job advertisements were first brought to Blood's attention by a constituent who saw a posting online for the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home, which falls in Blood's district. Postcards were also mailed out with information about how to apply.

Upon seeing the posting, Blood got to work on her letter and sent it out by the end of the day.

"That was concerning because we had all of our medical entities say they were going to ask all of their workers to be vaccinated because of the Delta variant," Blood told Newsweek.

Several healthcare systems in Nebraska have announced they will require all employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

"My constituents are concerned because the people who enter into [the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home] have health issues," Blood said.

The state's job posting contradicts the United States Department of Veterans Affairs mandates among its medical employees.

In a July 26 press release, Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough outlined the reasons for the mandate among medical professionals, including physicians, dentists and registered nurses.

"We're mandating vaccines for Title 38 employees because it's the best way to keep Veterans safe, especially as the Delta variant spreads across the country," he said. "Whenever a veteran or VA employee sets foot in a VA facility, they deserve to know that we have done everything in our power to protect them from COVID-19. With this mandate, we can once again make—and keep—that fundamental promise."

Blood said while she supports an individual's personal freedoms, she believes it's important to prioritize the health and wellbeing of the veterans who don't have a say in who takes care of them.

"I do understand that we have a serious shortage of staff," Blood's letter read. "We also know that a part of these shortages are systemic issues under management. We've all received information from existing and past employees concerned with the workplace environment. With that said, putting those who live in facilities at risk because we need to find bodies to hire is not acceptable."

Blood concluded her letter asking for a response by August 27. She told Newsweek she has not yet heard from the governor or Hilgert.

Her letter received the support of a handful of her fellow legislators and said that not everyone was comfortable discussing the issue.

"The loudest group of people is not necessarily the majority," Blood told Newsweek. "I respect everyone's right and the right to protest, but when it comes to Nebraska's most vulnerable, I'm not going to stay silent, especially when it comes to our veterans."

Newsweek has reached out to Governor Pete Ricketts' office and John Hilgert but did not hear back by the time of publication.

John Hilgert CLSSEGB  
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Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs  
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