

VA CHOOSES NOT TO FIRE OFFICIAL



The Department of Veterans Affairs has chosen to reject the call made by lawmakers in which it was suggested that the Department of Veterans Affairs fire the official who gave the okay for the training conferences that took place during last year. The training conferences, which were held in the state of Florida, ended up costing taxpayers around \$6.1 million. A statement was recently released in which it stated that the VA Secretary, Eric Shinseki, met with the Chief of Staff, Robert Gingrich, to discuss the fact that he should have been asking more questions about these particular conferences. In a report from the Inspector General on the conferences, it was suggested that administrative action be taken against Robert Gingrich due to his lack of questioning the conferences. The Inspector General felt as though action should be taken against Gingrich due to the irresponsible spending that took place at the conferences. A joint letter, which was released on Tuesday by both Representative Jeff Miller and Senator Richard Burr, stated that Gingrich should be removed from his position due to the number of failures that occurred with the conference, especially since the talk of these conferences has led to a whole lot of scandal and unnecessary spending. They also stated in their joint statement that the Inspector General felt as though administrative action should be taken. However, Shinseki has decided not to proceed further and terminate Gingrich from his position, which is one of the very few times that the Secretary for the Veterans Affairs has chosen not to follow a recommendation that has come from the Inspector General. The Inspector General said that Gingrich signed off on vague plans without looking further into detail to find out more about what was going on with the conference and that Gingrich should have asked more questions to find out more about what was going on. The Inspector General did admit that the blame should not be put solely on Gingrich. The Inspector General quoted Gingrich as having said, "I signed the thing authorizing the conferences. So, I should have made sure the conferences were executed better. Now, I think people should have done more prudent work. But it's my signature upon that page. And I take the full responsibility. And I should have asked, probably, harder questions than I did. ... But I also think there is a bunch of senior executives, regardless of whether they are SES [senior executive service level] or above, that have responsibilities for the execution." In the meantime, the assistance secretary of human resources for the Veterans Affairs had chosen to resign recently before the report was released by the Inspector General.