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Fire VA Chief, Nixon Is Urged

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An influential congressman and two national veterans' organizations called on President Nixon yesterday to fire the chief of the Veterans Administration instead of putting him in charge of another study of veterans' problems.

In a radio address Sunday, the President acknowledged that the VA had administrative problems such as late benefits checks and he announced that VA Administrator Donald E. Johnson would head a special inter-agency committee to find solutions.

Yesterday Rep. Olin E. Teague of Texas, ranking Democratic member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and a congressional leader in that field for many years, complained that Mr. Nixon's proposal "is something like putting the fox in charge of the hen house."

National commanders of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Disabled American Veterans issued similar complaints.

Teague denounced "Johnson's incompetence" as VA chief for the last five years, blamed him for snarling the agency's education programs and accused him of damaging the quality of its veterans hospitals across the country with cost-cutting tactics.

"We had thought the White House would recognize that the deficiency is in the top administration of the Veterans Administration," Teague said. "Instead Johnson is being told to go investigate himself. I frankly doubt that the information which has been furnished the White House by congressional critics) has been

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made available to the President. The only possible solution at this point is in a change in the top administration of VA."

Johnson issued a late-afternoon rebuttal to the congressman, citing increased spending for education, veterans benefits, hospitals and housing as evidence of his accomplishments.

Johnson is a former national commander of the American Legion and that Veterans' organization was silent yesterday on the question of his leadership. Last week, when the nation was celebrating Honor Vietnam Veterans Day, a number of veterans testified before congressional forums on the inadequacies of the VA programs.

Teague's complaints included the charge that Johnson has attempted to "politicize" the VA by his staff

appointments and that he has "completely wrecked" the medical leadership of VA hospitals.

Johnson, the Texas congressman charged, conducted "a calculated campaign of harassment" against Dr. Marc J. Musser, the chief medical director, and his deputies and, despite White House intervention to stop it, the fight led to resignations by Musser and his chief deputy.

The VFW complain was in a telegram sent to the President by its commander-in-chief, Ray R. Soden.

"The establishment of a committee of Cabinet members chaired by the administrator of veterans affairs," Soden said, "offers no hope of effective recommendations for solutions."

Soden urged the President "to place competent leadership at the helm of the Veterans Administration."