

March 6, 2017

The Honorable Phil Roe
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roe:

The Reserve Officers Association of the United States supports the "VA Accountability First Act of 2017," to amend title 38 U.S.C., giving the Secretary of Veterans Affairs broader authority to establish performance accountability among employees within the department.

The public's trust in the quality of VA health care and benefits administration has needlessly suffered because VA employees were not doing their jobs and because VA managers at all levels neglected their responsibilities. Poor performance has cost veterans their health and even their lives; veterans die waiting for a claim settlement. Families trust that their loved one will be taken care of and not taken from them.

Civil servants must be accountable; poor performance must not be tolerated, nor mediocre performance rewarded with promotions and bonuses. Accountability will strengthen the civil service: high-performing teams will attract the nation's best into public service.

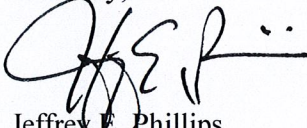
Of especial value are measures that affect the Senior Executive Service. Essentially beyond the reach of discipline and accountability, the SES is the "center of gravity" for an agency's performance: the effects of mediocrity at the top, with bonuses unjustified by performance, cascades through the ranks with devastating repercussions.

ROA also supports the act's increased whistleblower protections; in truth, the legislative branch and the agency's internal controls, such as its inspector general, have at best a limited capacity to identify abuses of the public trust that occur beyond detection, deep in the bureaucracy. Whistleblowers are a veteran's best friend and must be encouraged and protected.

But merely giving a federal agency the tools to make internal corrections does not necessarily lead to their use: Congress must exercise rigorous oversight, unsparingly revealing to public scrutiny the failures of agency heads and the administration in discharging their duties, and exerting all influential means appropriate to bring about correction.

ROA has a membership of 50,000 and is the only national military association that exclusively supports all the uniformed reserve components of the United States. Thank you for your efforts on this issue, and your support of our veterans. Please have your staff call Susan Lukas, ROA's legislative director, at 202-646-7713 or e-mail at slukas@roa.org with any question or issue you would like to discuss.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey E. Phillips
Executive Director