



The VA Accountability First Act of 2017

Background:

We've all heard stories about employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) who fail in their duty to serve veterans. While the vast majority of VA employees are hard-working and dedicated, because VA often fails to hold individuals who are not fulfilling their duties accountable for their actions, these bad actors taint the reputation of the department as a whole. In instances where VA has tried to take disciplinary action against an employee, the process is so administratively complex and lengthy that such action can take more than a year, often times being delayed indefinitely.

A [recent study](#) completed by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that, on average, it takes six months to a year, to remove a permanent civil servant in the Federal Government, though it often takes longer. Just last year, former VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson testified at a hearing that it was too hard to fire bad employees at VA.

In the past several years, VA's arcane civil service rules have hampered the department's ability to dismiss an employee that engaged in an armed robbery; discipline a VA nurse that participated in a veteran's surgery while intoxicated; and hold employees accountable for the continued failures to manage several major construction projects, including the new hospital in Aurora, Colorado, that is now several years and a billion dollars over budget

The VA Accountability First Act of 2017 would provide the VA Secretary increased flexibility to remove, demote, or suspend any VA employee, including Senior Executive Service employees, for performance or misconduct. It would also provide improved protections for whistleblowers; would allow the Secretary to reduce an employee's federal pension if they are convicted of a felony that influenced their job at VA; recoup a bonus provided to an employee who engaged in misconduct or poor performance prior to receiving the bonus; and would allow the Secretary to recoup any relocation expenses that were authorized for a VA employee only through the employee's ill-gotten means, such as fraud waste or malfeasance.

The Message

- America's veterans deserve the highest quality medical care and most efficient delivery of benefits possible.
- The vast majority of employees at VA are honest and hardworking, and it's unfair to the good employees when VA refuses to or cannot hold bad actors accountable.
- This bill will ensure these bad actors are accountable while improving and keeping intact important whistleblower protections.