|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/74/US-Senate-UnofficialAltGreatSeal.svg/2000px-US-Senate-UnofficialAltGreatSeal.svg.png   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **For Immediate Release:** | **Contacts:** | | May 11, 2017 | [Megan Taylor](mailto:megan_taylor@heller.senate.gov) 202-224-6244 (Heller) |     **Heller Introduces Bill to Increase Accountability at VA**  *Bipartisan Bill Protects Whistleblowers, Makes It Easier To Discipline Bad Actors*    **Washington, D.C** – U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) joined Senators Johnny Isakson (R-GA), chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Jon Tester (D-MT), ranking member of the committee, Marco Rubio (R-FL), and others to introduce the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act. This bipartisan legislation provides the leadership at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) the authority to fire bad employees and ensure appropriate due process protections for whistleblowers.    Currently, it is typical for leadership at the VA to place bad actors on administrative leave, sometimes for long periods of time, until a decision on their termination of employment is reached. Instead of allowing these employees to continue collecting paychecks while they're not doing their jobs, this legislation shortens the removal process and ensures an individual removed from the VA is not kept on the VA’s payroll while appealing that decision. It will also make it easier for the VA to remove poor performing senior executives and replace them with qualified candidates. Additionally, any appeals by senior VA executives would no longer be brought before the Merit Systems Protection Board, but instead would be handled directly by the VA secretary under an expedited timeline.    “We must do more to ensure that the VA is accountable to the veterans it was designed to serve, and this legislation is a step in the right direction. This bill promotes accountability at the VA by protecting whistleblowers who come forward and report problems, while also providing an effective avenue to discipline and remove bad actors. If you’re not doing your job, then you shouldn’t get paid – our bill makes sure of it,” **said Heller**. “I am proud to once again work with my friends across the aisle and my colleagues on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee to bring more transparency to an agency that must improve the service it provides to Nevada’s heroes.”    “When the VA cannot hold bad actors accountable, everyone loses,” **said Isakson.** “Taxpayer dollars are wasted on employees who are not fully committed to helping our veterans. Other employees at the VA suffer because they are forced to work alongside or take direction from delinquent individuals. Most egregiously, our veterans suffer because the people responsible for caring for them are putting themselves first – not our veterans. I am proud to introduce this bipartisan measure that will help create a culture of accountability at the VA by giving Secretary Shulkin the tools necessary to discipline bad employees in a timely manner while protecting whistleblowers from the threat of retaliation and ensuring the quality of care that our veterans receive at the VA.”    “To fully reform the VA and provide our nation’s veterans with the quality care they were promised and deserve, we must ensure the department can efficiently dismiss employees who are not able or willing to do their jobs,” **said Rubio**. “This legislation would improve on the law we enacted in 2014, and I’m grateful to Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Tester for working with us to craft a bill that will protect whistleblowers and the many VA employees who are passionate about caring for our veterans, while also empowering the VA to hold bad employees accountable. We must make real changes that put the well-being of our servicemembers before the best interests of bureaucrats.”    “This bipartisan bill will hold bad employees accountable while protecting the hardworking folks who care for our veterans,” **said Tester**. “The challenges at the VA are many, but tough problems require commonsense solutions and this bipartisan bill is a product of what happens when you put aside politics and work together. I want to thank Chairman Isakson and Senator Rubio for working hard to make the VA stronger and ensure it can better deliver for veterans.”    The legislation also contains a number of other provisions to hold employees accountable, including:             Requires the VA to evaluate supervisors based on the protection of whistleblowers;           Incentivizes managers to address poor performance and misconduct among employees by requiring the VA secretary to include this as part of the annual performance plan;           Prohibits bonuses for employees who have been found guilty of wrongdoing; and           Prohibits relocation expenses to employees who abuse the system.  U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), John McCain (R-AZ), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Bill Nelson, (D-FL), and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) are also cosponsors of the legislation.    ###  [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_fb.png](http://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Senator-Dean-Heller/325751330177) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_tw.png](http://twitter.com/SenDeanHeller) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_yt.png](http://www.youtube.com/user/SenDeanHeller) |