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**Senate Committee Approves Veterans Legislation***Heller Praises Passage Of VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act*

**Washington, D.C** – Today, the U.S. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee approved the Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, legislation introduced by U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL), and cosponsored by U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV), Johnny Isakson (R-GA), chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Jon Tester (D-MT), ranking member of the committee, and others. This legislation provides the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) leadership the authority to fire bad employees and ensure appropriate due process protections for whistleblowers.

“While the VA has taken steps to improve transparency and care delivery, we can and need to do more to improve accountability at the agency,” **said Heller.** “The Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act is an example of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee’s commonsense, bipartisan work and I welcome its approval out of committee today. I’m proud to support this legislation that I’m hopeful will lead to better care and better service for Nevada’s veterans at the VA, and I’ll continue to work to see that it becomes law.”

The VA should have the ability to swiftly fire bad employees, but unfortunately the VA has to place these individuals on administrative leave, sometimes for long periods of time, until a final decision is reached.  It is a disservice to veterans that poorly-performing employees cannot be quickly fired and instead are allowed to continue collecting paychecks while the lengthy removal process takes place.  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.

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.

Earlier this year, Heller joined Senators Johnny Isakson (R-GA), chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Jon Tester (D-MT), ranking member of the committee, along with Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), John McCain (R-AZ), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Bill Nelson, (D-FL), and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) as an original cosponsor.

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