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**In Case You Missed It: “Fixing the VA and Helping Restore our Commitment”**



[**Fixing the VA and helping restore our commitment**](http://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/359525-fixing-the-va-and-helping-restore-our-commitment)

*Sen. Dean Heller*

More than 21 million veterans currently live in the U.S., including 300,000 in my home state of Nevada. Those veterans have sacrificed so much to keep the rest of us safe.

Generation after generation of brave individuals have left their families and friends to answer our nation’s call and fight for something bigger than themselves: this country and its special way of life.

As the sole department responsible for supporting America’s veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs plays a unique and critical role in ensuring these warriors receive the support they need once the fighting has finished. In fact, the agency’s mission statement reads: “To care for him who shall have borne the battle.”

But in recent years, the VA hasn’t always lived up to that mission statement. And while VA Secretary David Shulkin is working tirelessly to turn the department around, recent scandals have broken some veterans’ faith in the health-care system designed specifically for them.

Take for example an investigation conducted by USA Today last month that found the department — for several years — has buried the mistakes and poor care made by its medical workers, and that the VA did not report all those individuals to the National Practitioner Data Bank or state licensing boards, consequently allowing them to provide care to other patients elsewhere.

Those practices are unacceptable and outrageous, and they have compelled me to take action. Veterans seeking medical services from the VA should be receiving the best care possible in their time of need and by a professional who fulfills the agency’s creed.

As a senior member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I believe it is our nation’s solemn responsibility to support those who put their lives on the line. That’s why I plan on introducing legislation this month to address this very issue.

My bill will require the VA to report major adverse actions to the National Practitioner Data Bank and state licensing boards. It will also prohibit the VA from signing settlements with fired or dismissed VA employees that commits the VA to concealing serious medical errors or purging negative records from personnel files.

But while there is still a lot of work to be done to bring the VA to its full potential, I am pleased with the bipartisan progress Congress has made in the last few months to fix the department.

In just the last 10 months, the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee has made huge strides in passing several legislative proposals into federal law. Bills to bring accountability to the VA, expand veterans’ GI Bill education benefits, ensure veterans’ continued access to life-saving surgeries and offer veterans more options when appealing their disability claims have all been signed into law by President Trump. And I’m proud to have played a key part in pushing these bills over the finish line.

We also have a secretary who is engaging with the veteran community and Congress to improve the department, particularly its response to gaps in mental health services. That is crucially important because Nevada has the third-highest veteran suicide rate in the U.S. I was humbled to speak with Secretary Shulkin in Reno, Nev., this summer about this issue and the challenges rural veterans face when seeking treatment for their invisible injuries.

I believe each and every veteran should be a considered a priority the moment they transition out of service, and that’s what I will continue to push for in Congress. Whether you are amongst the greatest generation, fought in Korea and Vietnam, or served in the Persian Gulf and post-9/11 wars, you deserve the quality care, support and benefits you’ve earned while serving this country.

It is clear that Congress is one step closer to fixing the VA, and I’m honored to be a part of this bipartisan effort. These new laws will help restore our country’s sacred promise to America’s veterans.

*Heller is the senior senator from Nevada and is a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.*

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