

**First Regular Session
Seventy-first General Assembly
STATE OF COLORADO**

INTRODUCED

LLS NO. M17-0884.01 Erin Enders

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SENATE SPONSORSHIP

Hill and Garcia,

Senate Committees

SENATE MEMORIAL 17-002

101 **CONCERNING MEMORIALIZING CONGRESS TO HOLD THE UNITED**
102 **STATES DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ACCOUNTABLE.**

1 WHEREAS, Colorado is home to more than 400,000 veterans; and

2 WHEREAS, The United States Department of Veterans Affairs
3 (VA) spent more than \$3.5 billion on health care and benefits for
4 Colorado veterans in 2015; and

5 WHEREAS, Two years ago Congress and the VA implemented a
6 \$16 billion program to drastically decrease the amount of time veterans
7 wait for health care, yet today veterans wait longer than ever to see a
8 provider; and

9 WHEREAS, The VA is having trouble attracting doctors--a recent
10 survey showed that only 1.9 to 2.5 percent of physicians found
11 government or military employment a desirable practice setting; and

12 WHEREAS, The shortage of providers and subsequent lack of
13 care is reflected in the fact that the rate of suicide is 21 percent higher for
14 veterans and has increased by 32 percent since 2001; and

Shading denotes HOUSE amendment. Double underlining denotes SENATE amendment.
Capital letters indicate new material to be added to existing statute.
Dashes through the words indicate deletions from existing statute.

1 WHEREAS, On average, 20 veterans commit suicide every day;
2 and

3 WHEREAS, Until recently, the VA was treating chronic pain
4 almost exclusively with opioids, resulting in an addiction and fatal
5 overdose rate among veterans that is almost double the national average;
6 and

7 WHEREAS, All America's veterans have unique needs, and the
8 VA should refocus its work and prioritize veterans with
9 service-connected disabilities and specialized needs; and

10 WHEREAS, The VA has repeatedly come under fire from veterans
11 groups and lawmakers for its failure to punish corrupt employees and
12 address the systemwide failure that has resulted in false, misleading wait
13 times and serious medical care issues; and

14 WHEREAS, Two measures to hold the VA accountable for its
15 egregious lack of service to and neglect of the nation's veterans passed
16 unanimously out of the United States House of Representatives but
17 remain stalled in the Senate; and

18 WHEREAS, Congress must act to hold all VA employees
19 responsible, particularly those in leadership roles; and

20 WHEREAS, Documented cases of whistleblower retaliation
21 continue to plague the VA, exposing the harassment and attempted
22 bribery of former VA employees who have brought the department's
23 failures to light; and

24 WHEREAS, The VA needs much stronger whistleblower
25 protections, as ideas for systemwide change and reform need to come
26 from within and those who expose abuse and waste should be protected;
27 and

28 WHEREAS, As the demographics of America's veterans rapidly
29 change, their system of care needs to change as well to ensure
30 high-quality, consistent health care and benefits for all veterans; now,
31 therefore,

32 *Be It Resolved by the Senate of the Seventy-first General Assembly*

1 *of the State of Colorado:*

2 That we, the members of the Senate, in recognition of the need to
3 hold the United States Department of Veterans Affairs accountable for
4 the health care of our nation's veterans, declare that the United States
5 Congress must pass reforms that prioritize our country's service men and
6 women over bureaucracy to ensure that those who risked everything for
7 our country receive the best care possible.

8 *Be It Further Resolved,* That copies of this Memorial be sent to
9 David Shulkin, United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Major
10 General Michael A. Loh, Adjutant General of Colorado; members of the
11 United States House Committee on Veterans' Affairs; members of the
12 United States Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs; and the members
13 of Colorado's congressional delegation.