



SENATE MEMORIAL 17-002

BY SENATOR(S) Hill and Garcia, Aguilar, Baumgardner, Cooke, Coram, Court, Crowder, Donovan, Fenberg, Fields, Gardner, Guzman, Holbert, Jahn, Jones, Kagan, Kefalas, Kerr, Lambert, Lundberg, Marble, Martinez Humenik, Merrifield, Moreno, Neville T., Priola, Scott, Smallwood, Sonnenberg, Tate, Todd, Williams A., Zenzinger, Grantham.

MEMORIALIZING CONGRESS TO HOLD THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ACCOUNTABLE.

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, Until recently, the VA was treating chronic pain almost exclusively with opioids, resulting in an addiction and fatal overdose rate

among veterans that is almost double the national average; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Be It Resolved by the Senate of the Seventy-first General Assembly of the State of Colorado:

That we, the members of the Senate, in recognition of the need to hold the United States Department of Veterans Affairs accountable for the health care of our nation's veterans, declare that the United States Congress must pass reforms that prioritize our country's service men and

women over bureaucracy to ensure that those who risked everything for our country receive the best care possible.

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

Kevin Grantham
PRESIDENT OF
THE SENATE

Effie Ameen
SECRETARY OF
THE SENATE