

## **Rep. Bill Flores VA Conference Committee Remarks**

I am humbled to serve on this conference committee working to finalize legislation to help our nation's veterans. When our military men and women return to civilian life, we owe it to them to keep our promises and provide them with the best health care and benefit services possible.

As we all know, the VA health care system has been plagued with poor performance and an unresponsive bureaucracy. Because of the dysfunctional culture at parts of the VA, over 57,000 veterans have had to wait over three months to receive their first medical appointment. Additionally, nearly 64,000 veterans never received their requested appointments.

Having just one veteran denied an appointment or having to wait longer than necessary for basic or life saving care is unacceptable. We must focus on creating a more accountable VA with a smaller bureaucracy that is committed to putting the care of our nation's veterans first.

As an original cosponsor of the Veterans Access to Care Act, I am pleased to see this legislation come closer to reality. This legislation provides those veterans waiting for care the ability to see a doctor or health care provider outside the VA system immediately. It will make sure that fewer veterans suffer as a result of the VA's inability to provide timely care. It has been disheartening to learn that the VA has been failing to do its primary job and our veterans are suffering because of the VA's blatant misconduct and mismanagement.

I also look forward to a positive resolution on bipartisan, bicameral language regarding accountability for VA management. I believe the new VA secretary will need tools to cut through the mounds of red tape to discipline and remove senior leaders that cultivated substandard behavior.

The culture at the VA has clearly lost its way and is in need of leadership that can restore focus towards its core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence. It is time to put the interests of America's veterans ahead of the interests of federal bureaucrats, so that we keep our promises to the brave men and women who have protected so much for our freedom and liberty.

The department is failing to do its primary job, which is to provide the best health care and benefit services to our veteran. It is time that underperforming senior leaders are fired and/or punished for their poor performance; as opposed to the status quo of ignoring mismanagement and rewarding misconduct. Our nation's heroes deserve better.

I look forward to coming together with my fellow conferees to iron out the differences between our respective bills to ensure our veterans are receiving proper, timely care.

Longer term, we in Congress need to chart a path to build a VA for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A VA that is focused upon putting veterans first and following core values. This new VA should be smaller, more agile, less bureaucratic, more responsive to America's veterans, and a better value to hardworking American taxpayers.

We need to adapt a "moon shot" approach to do this in the near future.

Thank you; I yield back.