



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

June 24, 2019

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I was disappointed when told of the Committee's hearing titled, "Learning from Whistleblowers at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)," scheduled for June 25, 2019.

When the hearing was formally scheduled, the Department was notified that you intended to listen to the experiences of VA whistleblowers and focus on how they understood the process for allegations of departmental mismanagement and misconduct. You are also apparently seeking information on encounters whistleblowers have had with VA offices tasked with overseeing whistleblower protection and employee accountability. What is entirely missing from the hearing is any official from the Department who could offer your Committee historical context and facts that would shed light on a complex issue; as of this writing, no Department official is slated to testify.

Furthermore, your Committee would not disclose who would be testifying from the whistleblowers' perspective, and I did not learn of the three witnesses who are Department employees until I read a news article in USA Today this past weekend. Two of the witnesses named in the article submitted their whistleblower complaints several years before the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection was established in 2017. As you know, the Department is limited in what we can discuss publicly regarding their individual concerns due to Privacy Act conditions.

When the Committee holds a hearing to air criticisms of the Department, while simultaneously preventing the Department from participating to offer context and defend itself, the Committee's efforts risk appearing more like a political press conference than a hearing aimed at a balanced look at serious issues. If this is how the Committee intends to conduct oversight of the Department in the future, an exclusionary approach could chip away at the Committee's oft stated goal of bipartisanship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert L. Wilkie".

Robert L. Wilkie