



U.S. Department of
Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 25, 2019

VA Secretary: One-Sided Hearing Puts HVAC Bipartisanship at Risk

WASHINGTON — Today, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie released a letter he wrote to House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mark Takano regarding the committee's decision to exclude VA from testifying before the committee during a [hearing](#) on the department's handling of whistleblower complaints.

In the letter, Wilkie expressed disappointment with the committee's new, one-sided approach, a departure from the holistic oversight the committee has conducted for years.

"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," Wilkie wrote.

The letter is available [here](#), and the full text is below.

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,

Robert L. Wilkie

###