

Congressman Paul A. Gosar

Floor Speech—MilCon/VA Appropriations Act

Gosar Amendment Prohibiting Funds to Create or Maintain Unofficial Record-Keeping Systems

Mr. Chairman,

I rise today to stand with veterans throughout the country and offer a simple amendment that seeks to prohibit funds in this bill from being used to create or maintain any unofficial record-keeping system at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

As many of you know, numerous news reports have surfaced that assert the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Health Care System has been using secondary, unofficial records of veterans' claims and appointment requests.

These allegations claim that the reasoning behind these actions was to misrepresent the actual wait times that veterans faced as they sought health care.

A whistleblower has come forward and alleged the facility was taking the vets' application information, transcribing that information to an unofficial shared document, and only putting veterans' information and requests into the real system when they knew the veterans were likely to receive an appointment within a two-week time frame.

If true, on paper the VA Central Office here in Washington would be under the impression that wait-time goals for appointments were being met.

But according to reports, veterans were waiting months and months on end.

The House Veterans Affairs Committee is conducting an investigation into the matter and so far has said as many as 40 veterans suffered and died while waiting for appointments through the Phoenix VA System.

Their investigation is ongoing, and they fear there could be many more deaths as a result of this negligence.

I would like to thank Full Committee Chairman Miller and Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman Coffman for their efforts on this front.

The Inspector General's Office at the VA is also conducting investigations into these allegations.

It is my hope that we get the full truth soon and that those responsible are held accountable.

Depending on the findings, criminal charges may even be in order.

But in the meantime, my goal is to ensure that such record-keeping practices are not allowed to take place.

I have said this before, but it is sad that we have to legislate in this way.

But when government bureaucrats don't use good judgment and common sense, regulations and laws must be changed to prevent bad behavior.

No matter what the investigations show, and no matter who was involved, this practice must be prevented in the future.

My amendment seeks to do just that.

Only the official systems approved by the Veterans Administration's Central Office should be used.

This way, we have oversight, accountability and uniformity.

It is my hope that one day, we'll also have a little more efficiency in these processes.

Thank you for your consideration.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support passage of my commonsense amendment, and with that Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.