

JANUARY 2026

BREAKING THE PACT

**IMPACTS OF TRUMP, DOGE, AND COLLINS'
ONGOING ASSAULT ON VETERANS**

MINORITY REPORT

from

**THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
DEMOCRATIC STAFF**

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL RANKING MEMBER SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS



At the beginning of his second term, President Donald Trump inherited a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) delivering record levels of care and benefits to veterans and their families. This was made possible because of the PACT Act and the Department's strategic, proactive upstaffing to address increased demand for its services.

Instead of building on that progress and prioritizing the best interests of veterans,

Secretary Doug Collins has served as a rubber-stamp for President Trump and Elon Musk—recklessly and relentlessly executing harmful policies that put veterans' care and benefits at greater risk than ever before.

These policies—including a hiring freeze, illegal mass firings of VA employees, encouraged departures of more than 30,000 staff, and cancellation of thousands of contracts providing critical services and support to veterans—have reversed progress made over multiple Administrations and years of bipartisan work.

At the same time, VA's communication under Collins—the least transparent Secretary in recent memory—has become delayed, distorted, and disingenuous. The Department has slow-walked and stonewalled Congressional oversight; retreated from basic and long-held expectations of accountability and disclosure to veterans, survivors, caregivers, and taxpayers; and politicized the Department to an unprecedented degree. This behavior directly contradicts how any VA should function and has been expected to function under previous Republican and Democratic Administrations.

Make no mistake, the chaos and corruption of the Trump Administration is deliberate and purposeful. It is coupled with an overtly adversarial

approach to oversight. We have seen Collins publicly backtrack from his most ill-conceived pronouncements after the impacts of his decisions came to light. And we have seen the self-righteous vitriol he directs at anyone who attempts to hold him accountable or blow the whistle. It is a self-serving cycle that seeks to distract and to obscure the true human impacts of his policies.

The real-life impacts of this Administration are undeniable and growing. VA is losing doctors, mental health staff, nurses, and other direct care providers at untenable rates. Dedicated professionals with decades of expertise are fleeing and recruitment is flagging because of toxic work conditions and draconian cuts and firings. These policies are having a damaging and dangerous impact on the quality and timeliness of care that will be felt for years to come.

The deepening damage is seemingly why Collins and Trump have refused to provide Congress with the most basic facts about their malign, misguided policies and their impact on veterans. This report, compiled with input from veterans and VA employees, seeks to expose the extent of their cover-up and highlight the harm their policies have inflicted.

Its findings are clear: veterans are increasingly paying the price for this Administration's self-sabotage. And hard-working, talented VA employees are demoralized and exhausted by the malice and incompetence of their leadership.

As Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander Al Lipphardt testified, "It's time to apply pressure and stop the bleeding."

I call on every Member of Congress and every stakeholder to stand in support of our nation's sacred promise to veterans and make their voices heard. We must demand transparency and accountability. Our nation's veterans deserve no less.



United States Senator, Connecticut

Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Table of Contents

From the Desk of Richard Blumenthal

31 Threats to Reproductive Health Care

32 Dismantling Protections for Homeless Veterans

35 Benefits: Production at the Cost of Quality

37 One Big Betrayal: Further Harm to Veterans and Their Families

39 Defrauding Veterans

PART ONE

5 THE SYSTEMATIC DESTRUCTION OF THE VA WORKFORCE

7 A Look Back: More Care and Benefits Than Ever Before

8 VA's Historic Loss of Employees

9 The Hiring Freeze

11 Illegal Firings and Harassment of Public Servants

13 Disastrous Return-to-Office Mandates

15 Retaliation Against Employee Rights and Collective Bargaining

17 Politicization of Veterans Affairs

20 Mental Health Care at Risk

22 The Staffing Crisis

PART THREE

40 CONTRACTS IN CHAOS

42 All Slashing—No Strategizing

43 False Savings

PART FOUR

44 UNDERMINING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

45 Public Attacks on Press and Congress

46 Gutting Independent Oversight

PART TWO

26 UNPRECEDENTED CUTS TO CARE AND BENEFITS

27 Attacks on VA Research, Curtailing Innovation for All Americans

30 Deterioration of Care

Final Thoughts: Directly from Veterans and Their Families

PART ONE: THE SYSTEMATIC DESTRUCTION OF THE VA WORKFORCE

“These actions risk burnout among remaining employees, who are already understaffed, overworked, and now forced to absorb the duties of eliminated positions... The Secretary’s inability to provide basic data during recent testimony, while simultaneously pushing sweeping structural changes, raises serious questions about the credibility and integrity of VA leadership. You cannot reform a system if you don’t understand its current state. The Department is on a dangerous path that will harm veterans, demoralize employees, and waste taxpayer dollars.”

—VA Human Resources employee
May 6, 2025

In 2022, Congress passed the PACT Act—the largest expansion of health care and benefits for veterans in decades. To address the historic surge in PACT Act-related care and benefits, the Biden VA took advantage of new authorities and resources to expand its workforce through bolstered recruitment and retention strategies.

Rather than build upon this success or adopt new policies to meet increased veteran demand, Trump, Collins, and Musk used a chainsaw to tear down VA’s workforce and systematically degrade its capacity to serve veterans.

On his first day in office, Trump instituted a government-wide hiring freeze. Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and Collins followed suit by working together to illegally fire 2,400 probationary VA employees. These actions laid the groundwork for Collins to publicly announce a goal of firing an additional 83,000 employees within the year—a goal driven by an arbitrary statistic, not a desired outcome for veterans.

Testimony from the field...

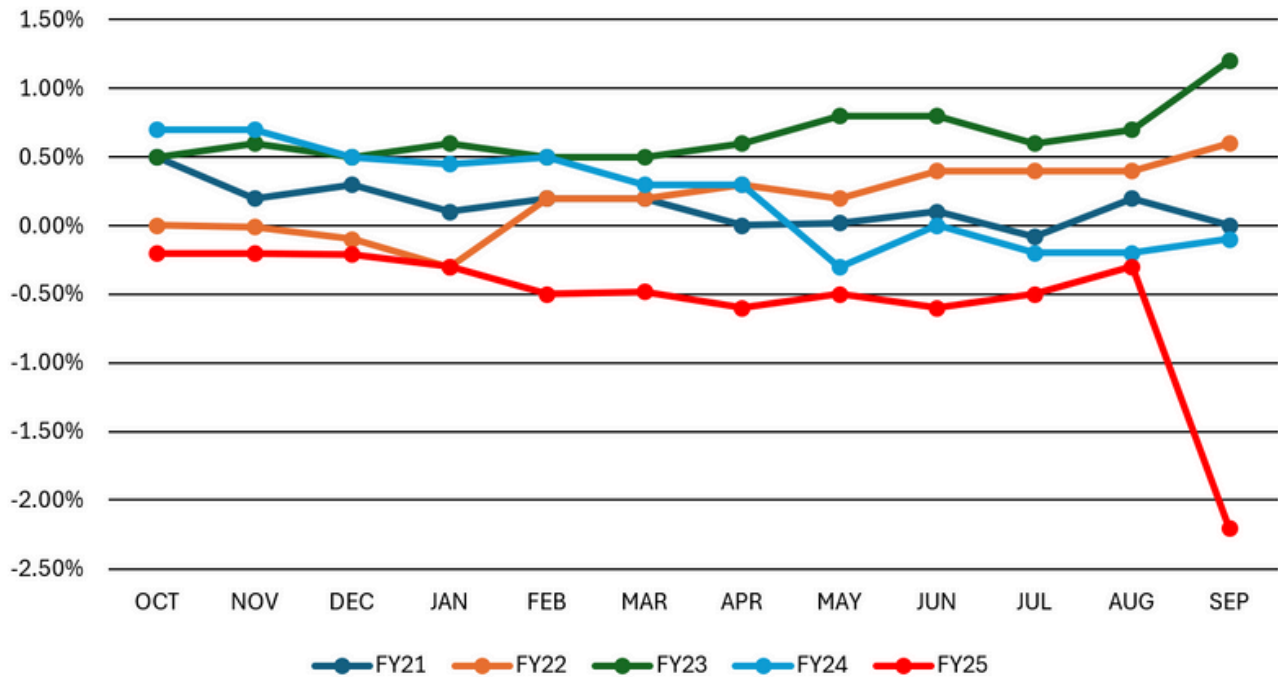
“At least in combat, I knew my mission. I was supported in it by my teammates, by my leadership, and I had agency. I had a weapon. I could fight against a tangible enemy. Now it’s just an invisible cloud of dread.”

—Decorated veteran and VA therapist describing working conditions in Trump’s VA
March 7, 2025

While Collins subsequently retreated from this goal after public outcry, he continues to establish new, arbitrary, nonstrategic caps on staffing levels across the Department. As per a leaked memo, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), National Cemeteries Administration (NCA), and VA’s Central Office (VACO) have been directed to determine new staffing caps that will remain in effect for the foreseeable future.

Because of these and other directives, morale at VA is plummeting, Veterans Crisis Line employees are overwhelmed, and veterans are losing access to care because clinicians are leaving the Department.

VA Percentage Growth of Onboard Employees
as of September 30, 2025



Directly from veterans...

“[VA] has provided quality health care to me for the last 5 years. Its doctors, nurses, and support staff are simply amazing. It has been as much a tool of upward mobility for me as it is a way to access medical care. Words cannot express how much I will lament the VA’s departure if it is gutted and privatized. This is not the answer. Please. Stand up for vets by standing up for the VA and its exceptional people.”

—Veteran, Louisiana
February 27, 2025

A LOOK BACK: MORE CARE AND BENEFITS THAN EVER BEFORE

“By nearly every metric, VA’s smashing records we set last year. That’s even more care, more benefits, to more Vets. And it’s not just more care... It’s better, world-class care, and it’s better health outcomes for Veterans than in the private sector. It’s not just more benefits... It’s faster, more accessible benefits. And it’s not just more Vets... It’s more Vets trusting VA at rates higher than ever before.”

—Denis McDonough
VA Secretary
(February 2021-January 2025)
[October 29, 2024](#)

When Trump took office, the level of VA care and benefits was at historic highs in terms of both quality and quantity, and VA made tremendous improvements in customer service. Despite a historic increase in the number of veterans seeking care and benefits, wait times for care and the time to process benefits claims both decreased in 2024.

In fact, from 2023 to 2024, more than 80 percent of VA hospitals saw additional patients, and VA delivered more than 127.5 million health care appointments in 2024 alone. That includes the largest ever enrollment year for women veterans. Despite this surge in demand, wait times for primary care appointments decreased for nearly 20 percent of new patients.

At the same time, veteran trust in VA reached above 80 percent for the first time ever in 2024, an increase of 25 percent since 2016. Veteran trust in VA health care reached 92 percent—another record. Because of the previous Administration’s workforce policies, VA was able to more effectively recruit employees to better serve veterans and was named one of the top five best places to work in the federal government.

In just one year, Trump, Collins and Musk have taken this reality and—driven by partisan politics rather than the best interests of veterans—created a culture of fear, panic, and confusion within VA that harms veterans and will take years to reverse.

Government
Executive

VA Is Hiring at a Record Rate. Employees Say It's Still Not Enough.

By Eric Katz

March 21, 2023

MilitaryTimes

Record workload for VA in 2023 means more hiring in 2024

By Leo Shane III

Nov 6, 2023

VA'S HISTORIC LOSS OF EMPLOYEES

In March, VA's Chief of Staff, in coordination with DOGE, issued a memo detailing plans for a massive reduction in force (RIF) that would result in the firing of as many as 83,000 VA employees, roughly 15 percent of the Department's entire workforce. It quickly became clear the process was driven by an arbitrary statistic, rather than a desired outcome for veterans, with little input from VA subject matter experts who could identify potential harmful impacts.

On July 7, after months of backlash from veterans and Congress, Collins abandoned his disastrous plan. But instead of acknowledging its shortcomings, he celebrated that VA was already on pace to lose as many as 30,000 employees in FY 2025. He claimed it was through "natural attrition," voluntary early retirement, and deferred resignation programs (DRP).

But data proves there is nothing natural about these losses. In a typical year, VA's workforce gains a net of at least 10,000 employees. Under the first year of Trump, Collins, and Musk, the workforce has experienced a net loss three times that number. VA is hemorrhaging employees at dramatic and unsustainable rates, and the exodus has only just begun.

Net change in key VA Employee roles in Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025*

Position	FY 24	FY 25
RN	2,793	-3,002
Claims Processor	1,819	-1,905
MSA (Scheduler)	964	-1,556
Custodian	126	-1,106
Physician	462	-1,068
Social Worker	955	-716
Police	174	-293
HR Specialist	597	-291
Psychologist	348	-228

*Data from VA's Workforce Dashboard.

Directly from veterans...

"Although my local CBOC is doing an amazing job with limited assets, staffing issues are emerging. Staff nurses are having to cover multiple clinics in order to provide care. I recently had to speak with a clinic nurse who was 'covering' for two other nurses. She told me that lack of staffing is beginning to erode care especially in specialty clinics."

—Oregon veteran
April 2025

THE HIRING FREEZE

“A hiring freeze has the potential to impact millions of veterans, particularly those waiting on adjudication of claims post-PACT Act... To prevent delays or denials of benefits our veterans deserve, Congress must urge the Administration to exempt Veterans Benefits Administration personnel from the hiring freeze.”

—James LaCoursiere, Jr., National Commander
The American Legion
February 26, 2025

On day one of his current term, Trump instituted a hiring freeze across the federal government. Existing job offers were rescinded, including those to VA doctors and nurses. Across the country, recruitment efforts for front-line, in-demand health care professionals, benefits claims processors, and other critical positions were effectively halted. Though exemptions were subsequently issued for certain positions, the damage was already done. As a result, countless talented professionals—including those slated to fill critical and hard-to-fill roles—were turned away because of a reckless and arbitrary policy driven by politics.

Nearly a year later, in January 2026, the Department issued a memo (see image on page 10) seemingly removing hiring freeze restrictions, but the damage had already been done. While the list of positions exempted from the hiring freeze slowly grew following public and internal pushback, positions essential to VA operations remained at a standstill.



VA reinstates job offers to health care hires, but some still in limbo amid hiring freeze

Jory Heckman | @jheckmanWFED

January 27, 2025 6:55 pm 9 min read

Letters to the Administration...

January 23, 2025

*“[The hiring freeze] is a **betrayal of trust to veterans** on day one of your Administration, and it is a betrayal of trust to prospective VA employees intent on serving veterans – an action that will undoubtedly have long-term impacts on VA’s ability to effectively recruit and retain the physicians, nurses, and other critical positions that make VA the preferred option for care for veterans.”*

Signed,

Senator Blumenthal and 24 other Democratic Senators

This included engineering staff required to keep facilities up and running, various positions at VBA, leadership roles across the Department necessary for implementing reforms and overseeing day-to-day operations of facilities, and human resources assistants essential to hiring and employee accountability. These positions lost employees in droves as most of them were eligible for DRP and early retirement offers, forced to work in person full-time for the first time ever, and generally deemed nonessential and unneeded by the new political leaders in the Department.

Furthermore, only facilities that are operating within strict staffing caps can potentially hire for roles that had been subject to the hiring freeze until recently. Facility leadership in the field are still reporting denials and severe delays in hiring approvals for all positions from clinical staff to custodians to claims processors.

Department of Veterans Affairs	Memorandum
Date: JAN 13 2026	
From: Under Secretary for Health (10)	
Subj: Removal of Hiring Freeze Restrictions for VISNs that Achieve Position Threshold Allocation (VIEWS 14237054)	
To: Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Directors (10N1-23)	
Thru: VHA Office of Human Capital Management (106)	

1. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this memorandum is to inform VISN leadership that all hiring freeze restrictions, to include the filling of any occupation through the competitive process, is lifted. Requests to hire above approved authorizations, are required to be submitted and approved by the VA Strategic Hiring Committee.

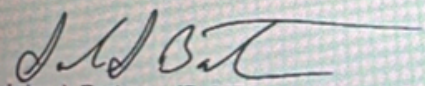
2. **BACKGROUND:** VA is continuing efforts to improve manpower management and resource allocation practices. For VHA, these activities are a continuation of efforts to better align positions with budget and workload. By using historical workload and future growth estimates to determine staffing needs, VHA can improve our ability to serve Veterans by proactively and strategically identifying recruitment needs through a requirements-based approach.

3. **IMPLEMENTATION:**

a. Each VISN has been allocated a baseline number of positions calculated on their budgeted FTE plus anticipated needs for growth. VHA HCM will certify that VISNs have met the position threshold.

b. Leaders and managers must manage operational needs within their cumulative full-time equivalent (FTE) budget and position thresholds. Organizational and personnel change requests must be submitted and approved in accordance with promulgated guidance that ensures proper oversight and stewardship of valuable resources and the efficient allocation of agency resources.

4. VHA HCM will send additional information through the Network Directors and Chief Human Resource Officers shortly. Questions may be sent to VHAHR@va.gov.


John J. Bartrum, JD, MBA

ILLEGAL FIRINGS AND HARASSMENT OF PUBLIC SERVANTS

“People don’t understand how important these roles are. They are critical. They’re trained and certified. We can’t just replace them with random hospital employees.”

—Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Hospital Administrator

On January 28, 2025, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) sent a resignation offer to all federal employees, including VA staff, urging them to resign if they could not commit to embracing the Administration’s “standards of suitability and conduct.” Even after limitations were placed on the types of positions eligible for this offer, numerous individuals serving in critical positions at VA—including many experiencing shortages—were approved with no commitment from VA to backfill lost job duties.

Of the 14,000 VA employees who requested approval for the first DRP offer, more than 3,000 were approved, including 2,000 VHA employees. In April, VA announced another resignation offer, and tens of thousands of employees applied. Though some applications were denied because of an employee’s role in clinical care and operations, the message to the entire workforce was very clear—you are expendable.

In February, Collins, acting on orders from DOGE, fired 2,400 probationary VA employees—men and women who had recently been hired or promoted. The Administration targeted these probationary employees solely because their employment classification provided them with fewer legal protections. The firings were carried out with no regard to the employee’s performance or the role that employee was providing on behalf of veterans.

Letters to the Administration...

February 27, 2025

*“Federal civil service has long been a preferred path for military-affiliated populations, **allowing them to continue serving their country** while offering competitive wages, benefits, and much-needed stability...Your Administration’s actions are damaging the economic security and morale of our military and veteran families, the federal government’s ability to recruit and retain high-quality talent, and ultimately, our national security.”*

Signed,

Senator Blumenthal and 21 other Democratic Senators

In response to public backlash from Congress and veterans, certain employees were subsequently reinstated. VA was also forced to offer reinstatement to others due to a court order, but simply put them on administrative leave—choosing to pay them while preventing them from performing their usual job duties on behalf of veterans.

Many employees who were offered reinstatement chose not to return because they could not afford the employment uncertainty instigated by Collins and Trump. Others, though they were reinstated, continue to search for alternative employment to avoid further whiplash from the Administration.



'These Are Human Beings': VA Fires 1,400 More Employees It Considers Nonessential

Military.com | By [Patricia Kime](#)
Published February 25, 2025 at 2:08pm ET




VA dismisses over 1,000 employees as part of probationary worker purge

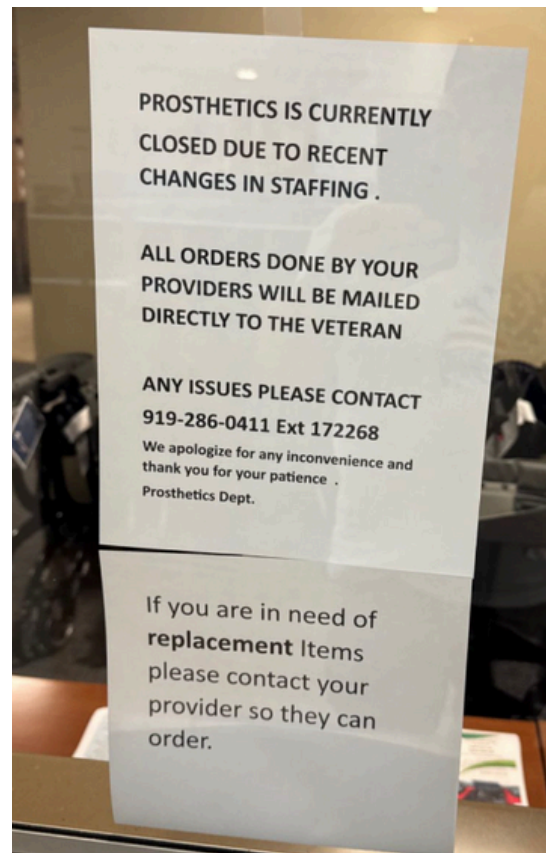
By [Leo Shane III](#) Friday, Feb 14, 2025



Fired VA health workers reinstated, but new staff don't trust Trump and Musk

 [Cybele Mayes-Osterman](#)
USA TODAY

Updated Feb. 22, 2025, 2:49 p.m. ET



Abrupt staffing disruptions and shortages in the prosthetics department at the Greenville, NC VA Clinic forced the office to temporarily close.

DISASTROUS RETURN-TO-OFFICE MANDATES

“Since the Trump admin enacted the EO terminating remote work, more than 10 people have left [my office]. These individuals did not leave because they do not enjoy the work they do. They did not leave because they are the villains DOGE painted federal employees out to be. They left because the work environment was no longer conducive to their established lives. The VA is hemorrhaging good people because of an unnecessary war on remote work. And this hemorrhage is going to directly affect veterans.”

—VA employee and veteran

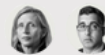
On the first day of his second term, Trump ordered all federal employees to work in-person, full-time at their assigned duty stations in federal buildings, abruptly ending existing telework and remote work arrangements. Collins implemented the order without first ensuring adequate space was ready and available. This quickly became an issue for VA employees and the quality of services provided to veterans, as many offices lacked appropriate space for employees to effectively do their jobs.

This short-sighted order also failed to take into consideration the historic productivity levels and increased recruitment that resulted from the existing remote hybrid work environment.

To date, this order has undermined critical VA functions and is expected to increase long-term costs to taxpayers. It will drive up expenses by increasing spending for new leases or construction, upgrades to networks and IT capabilities due to increased users, transportation subsidies, adjustments in locality pay for relocating employees to higher cost-of-living areas, and employee replacement costs due to resignations.

The New York Times V.A. Mental Health Care Staff, Crowded into Federal Buildings, Raise Patient Privacy Alarms

Clinicians at the Department of Veterans Affairs say the president's return-to-office order is forcing many of them to work from makeshift spaces where sensitive conversations can be overheard.



By [Ellen Barry](#) and [Nicholas Nehamas](#)

The reporters have been examining the impact of President Trump's overhaul of the federal government on veteran health care.

May 4, 2025



VA rescinds most telework, remote work policies for employees that still have them

Jory Heckman | [@jheckmanWFED](#)

February 21, 2025 5:32 pm ⌚ 7 min read

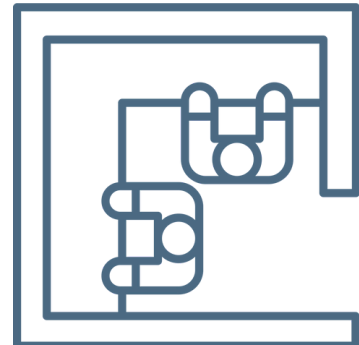
IN-PERSON WORK MANDATE DISASTER

- VA therapists had to inform their veteran patients they “cannot guarantee complete confidentiality” because of overly crowded work areas in VA facilities.
- Employees forced back into unsafe, chaotic, and inefficient office settings—some as extreme as converted shower stalls.
- Providers forced to have delicate conversations with patients on topics such as sexual health in semi-public settings.
- Oncology clinical pharmacists expressed serious concern about having to conduct conversations with veterans and their families about end of life care without privacy.
- VA employees, including service-connected disabled veterans, are having their reasonable accommodation requests denied or severely curtailed even though their health issues remain the same.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

As VA employees return to a changed workplace in Philadelphia, some are looking for the exit

by Fallon Roth and Ariana Perez-Castells
Published June 1, 2025, 5:00 a.m. ET



WYOMING PUBLIC MEDIA

‘It does impact how you feel about your job’: a VA nurse reflects on return to office orders

Wyoming Public Radio | By [Hannah Habermann](#)
Published August 1, 2025 at 4:33 PM MDT

Government Executive

Despite return-to-office deadline, some VA employees may still work remotely because there's not enough workspace

Veterans Health Administration employees who live within 50 miles of federal office space must begin working fully in person by May 5 if they're not already, but agency officials said there'll be leniency if there's not enough workspace.

By Sean Michael Newhouse
April 29, 2025

RETALIATION AGAINST EMPLOYEE RIGHTS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The vast majority of VA employees, many of whom are veterans, are represented by a union. On March 27, the President issued an Executive Order (EO) entitled “Exclusions from Federal Labor-Management Relations Programs,” which eliminated labor rights for the vast majority of these employees. This EO makes it more difficult for VA to fulfill its mission on behalf of veterans. It runs contrary to the purported goals of DOGE and the Trump Administration to reduce fraud, waste, and abuse across the federal government.

On August 6, contrary to guidance by OPM and despite ongoing litigation, VA announced it would implement the EO effective immediately and strip collective bargaining rights from 400,000 VA employees—almost 25 percent of whom are veterans.

For years, the added protections and support provided for bargaining-unit employees empowered them to speak out about waste, fraud, and abuse without risk of retaliation. This dynamic has greatly enhanced oversight efforts by VA and Congress and has significantly contributed to important follow-up investigations across multiple Administrations. Without these collectively-bargained protections in place, VA employees are more at risk of retaliation and less likely to come forward with concerns of waste, fraud, and abuse.

Many private sector health care entities have unionized workforces, especially for nurses. This will be the last straw for many VA employees, who can go to the private sector for higher pay and labor representation that is no longer available to them at VA. The mass exodus of VA staff and shortages of in-demand professions, like doctors and nurses, will only get worse.

S. 3174 VA Care and Benefits Accountability Act

On November 14, 2025, Senator Blumenthal (D-CT), Senator Murkowski (R-AK), Senator Schumer (D-NY), and Representative Ramirez (D-IL) announced their bipartisan legislation to restore VA employees’ collective bargaining rights in response to the Trump Administration’s cancellation of union contracts for 80 percent of VA employees.

The VA Care and Benefits Accountability (VA CBA) Act would restore cancelled union contracts and nullify Executive Order 14251 (90 Fed. Reg. 14553) and Executive Order 14343 (90 Fed. Reg. 42683).

Advocates push back:

“The real reason Collins wants AFGE out of the VA is because we have opposed the Trump Administration’s plan to dismantle veteran health care through the cutting of 83,000 jobs, successfully fought against the disastrous and anti-veteran recommendations from the Asset Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission that would have shut down several rural VA hospitals and clinics, and consistently educated the American people about how private, for-profit veteran health care is more expensive and results in worse outcomes for veterans. We don’t apologize for protecting veteran health care and will continue to fight for our members and the veterans they care for.”

—Everett Kelley, National President, American Federation of Government Employees

“The Trump Administration’s claim that this move helps veterans is preposterous. VA healthcare professionals rely on their union membership to safely report mismanagement, expose cover-ups, and push back against political interference and corrupt private contracting. Eliminating unions eliminates those safeguards, which is exactly why they’re doing it. This is going to be a disaster for veterans’ care.”

—Randy Erwin, National President, National Federation of Federal Employees

“It’s time to stand up for brave veterans who served our nation and ensure they get the best care possible. We must ensure every VA worker feels safe, valued, and free to exercise their constitutional right to freedom of speech. This is how we take care of our members so they can take care of our great vets.”

—Jim Farley, National Executive Vice President, National Association of Government Employees

“Nurses never abandon our patients, and we will continue to fight for the funding and safe staffing levels that our patients deserve. As union nurses, we understand that collective bargaining rights are fundamental to carrying out our critical role as patient advocates. It is because of VA nurses’ ability to speak up about patient safety through our union that our nation’s veterans receive the highest level of care.”

—National Nurses United

“Working people have no illusions about what just happened at the Department of Veterans Affairs: By cutting off union contracts, the Trump Administration has launched a disgusting attack on working people and veterans everywhere that we will not forget or forgive.”

—April Verett, President, Service Employees International Union

POLITICIZATION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

“The oath is to the Constitution, not a politician or president.”

—Veteran via [Project on Government Oversight](#)

Amidst the Administration’s assault on the VA workforce, Trump and Collins have politicized the work of VA and the position of VA Secretary to an unprecedented degree.

On his first day in office, Trump issued guidance to reinstitute “Schedule F” and moved tens of thousands of career non-partisan federal employees—including VA employees—into the same category as political appointees, with the intent of stripping them of many of their employment and due process rights.

Subsequently, on February 24, Trump required VA and other agencies to submit a plan to convert Senior Executive Service roles, the backbone of the professional government workforce, into political appointee positions. On July 17, Trump created an entirely new political workforce called “Schedule G” with a stated goal of adding further political appointees across the federal government, including at VA.

This is an an overt effort to pack the Department with partisan loyalists at the expense of health care and benefits experts best fit to serve veterans. At the same time, enactment of politically-motivated policies with little awareness of their impact has driven off countless career non-political staff with decades of institutional knowledge and experience.

Government
Executive

Trump creates 'Schedule G' to add more political appointees to agencies top ranks

ERIC KATZ | JULY 18, 2025

FEDERAL NEWS NETWORK

Trump revives executive order aiming to strip some federal employees of civil service protections

[Drew Friedman](#)

January 21, 2025 6:59 pm

Government
Executive

How a pair of executive orders and a memo could fast track the civil service’s politicization

ERICH WAGNER | JANUARY 21, 2025

FEDERAL NEWS NETWORK

Agencies tasked with opening many career SES roles to political appointments

[Drew Friedman](#)

February 24, 2025 7:21 pm

Taking things a step further, during the October 2025 federal government shutdown, the Secretary and his Administration continuously violated the Hatch Act, which limits political activities of federal employees to ensure federal programs are administered in a nonpartisan fashion and to protect federal employees from political coercion.

On September 30, VA spokesperson Peter Kasperowicz used partisan messaging and fearmongering, saying “radical liberals” are to be blamed for the government shutdown, adding that if “radical liberals” succeed, then “they will stop critical veterans care and assistance programs.”

On October 1st, VA sent out an email to millions of veterans targeting Democrats by name, claiming they are blocking the Continuing Resolution due to “unrelated policy demands.”

POLITICAL DISRUPTION

- Threatened disciplinary action against those who do not inform on fellow employees working on DEI programs and policies.
- Ordered VA facilities to remove bylaws requiring doctors to treat all veterans regardless of political affiliation, religion, and marital status.
- Ordered VA physicians and scientists not to publish in medical journals without first seeking clearance from political appointees.
- Required all senior staff to sign non-disclosure agreements that did not include legally required exceptions for whistleblowers—an unprecedented and highly political move aimed at reducing transparency with veterans and Congress.
- Established a task force on “anti-Christian bias” to investigate alleged discrimination against Christians and recommend policy changes.



Federal employees are told to name colleagues who work in DEI roles or risk 'adverse consequences'

Jan. 22, 2025, 8:53 PM EST

By Megan Lebowitz






Trump picks senior VA advisor to serve as top department watchdog

By Leo Shane III




📅 Wednesday, May 7, 2025

Partisan messaging continued throughout the shutdown, including an email on October 30, blaming, "The Democrats' decision to shut down the federal government..." for thousands of employees being furloughed or working without pay, the closure of VA regional offices, and more. This politicization of the VA workforce violates the Hatch Act and runs counter to how VA should function and always has functioned.

VA Secretary Doug Collins has advanced partisan messaging on his official X account, sharing multiple tweets throughout October blaming Democrats for the shutdown, even going as far as to say Democrats are the reason 30,000 VA employees are going without pay. These examples show Collins violating the Hatch Act and shirking his duty to relay factual information regarding contingency planning and lapses in programs during a time when veterans rely on that information.

 **VA Secretary Doug Collins**  
@SecVetAffairs

Couldn't be more disappointed in @SenBlumenthal's lack of leadership re: the Dems' govt. shutdown. Blumenthal claims to be an advocate for @DeptVetAffairs workers, but his vote for the shutdown is forcing 30,000+ VA employees to go without pay until the shutdown is over.

 **VA Secretary Doug Collins**  
@SecVetAffairs

.@SenGaryPeters and @SenatorSlotkin have each voted to support the government shutdown six times, and their steadfast advocacy for limiting @DeptVetAffairs services via the shutdown is hurting their constituents. Michigan Veterans don't deserve this!

 **VA Secretary Doug Collins**  
@SecVetAffairs

The Democrats' government shutdown has real consequences for Veterans and @DeptVetAffairs workers. More than 30,000 VA employees are already going without pay, and the longer the shutdown lasts, the more it hurts our outreach, career counseling and even cemetery operations. Learn more here: department.va.gov/contingency-pl...

 **VA Secretary Doug Collins**  
@SecVetAffairs




During the Democrat government shutdown, @DeptVetAffairs continues to provide Veterans with health care and disability benefits. But the longer this goes on, the more it will affect Veterans' lives. It's not a good way to do business.

 **VA Secretary Doug Collins**  
@SecVetAffairs

With their government shutdown, Democrats are putting politics ahead of troops, Veterans and VA employees. Sick.

 **VA Secretary Doug Collins**  
@SecVetAffairs

.@DeptVetAffairs health care facilities are open, and benefits are being processed. But the Democrat government shutdown is limiting services for Veterans and hurting 35,000+ VA employees, who are going without pay. department.va.gov/contingency-pl...

 **VA Secretary Doug Collins**  
@SecVetAffairs

.@DeptVetAffairs hospitals and clinics are open and benefits are still being processed, but the confusion caused by the Democrats' government shutdown is real. Get the facts about how the shutdown impacts VA here: department.va.gov/contingency-pl...

 **VA Secretary Doug Collins**  
@SecVetAffairs

See how the Democrats' government shutdown is impacting veterans - now on BlueSky
bsky.app/profile/deptve...

 **VA Secretary Doug Collins**  
@SecVetAffairs

More than 30,000 @DeptVetAffairs employees are going without pay because of the Democrats' government shutdown. But VA hospitals and clinics aren't affected - they are open - and VA benefits are still being processed. Learn more here: department.va.gov/contingency-pl...

MENTAL HEALTH CARE AT RISK

“[I] can confirm a ‘mass exodus’ of mental health clinicians this year. At one site in particular, 50 mental health care staff have already left or soon will leave. Half of the supervisors have left. And that doesn’t account for 100 positions that were temporarily vacant and thus wiped off the org chart last year in the budget shortfall.”

—VHA employee

The Trump-Collins VA continues to claim its damaging workforce policies have not affected mental health care, but whistleblowers, independent experts, and the data tell a different story.

STARS STRIPES

VETERANS

Medical staff shortages impeding VA mental health care, advocates tell lawmakers

By LINDA F. HERSEY

STARS AND STRIPES • March 25, 2025

As of January 6, 2026, the wait times for new patients for individual mental health appointments were more than 40 days in Arizona (51), California (41) Colorado (41), Connecticut (43) Iowa (43), Idaho (42), Kansas (49), Maryland (54), Maine (61), North Carolina (43), North Dakota (41), Nebraska (42), New Hampshire (48), New Mexico (47), and Virginia (52). This is more than double the wait time threshold (twenty days) that makes veterans eligible for care in the community. The national mean is more than thirty-five days.

Feedback from Experts

Exchange between Senator Blumenthal and a representative of the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) during a hearing before the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs on December 3, 2025—

Senator Blumenthal: What is maybe unique, certainly unusual, to the VA health care system is that it is discouraging talented mental health professionals from coming to the VA through policies of furloughs and firings. Would you agree?

VA OIG: So, I will say through our cyclical reviews where we go out to facilities, not for cause, to try to get a feel for culture and quality of care practices, we are getting more feedback that morale is going down because of the uncertainty within the federal government. So yes, while they aren’t participating in the DRP, or didn’t participate in the DRP, or other programs—clinical staff were exempted from that—they are still losing clinic staff because of morale.

Further, there have been credible reports that VA facilities across the country have been limiting the number of one-on-one therapy sessions veterans can receive.

The War Horse obtained copies of policies from VA medical centers through a Freedom of Information Act request—some recommended discharging most patients after eight sessions, others after fifteen or twenty-four. This comes following ongoing pressure from VA leadership to reduce wait-times by any means necessary despite increased demand for care and skyrocketing staff departures from the Department.

the
WAR HORSE

'I Feel Lost.' Anxiety Grows Among Veterans Cut off From VA One-on-One Therapy

DECEMBER 11, 2025 | LEAH ROSENBAUM

the
WAR HORSE

'We Need to Terminate Treatment': VA Mental Health Providers Say They Are Under Pressure to Limit Care

AUGUST 26, 2025 | LEAH ROSENBAUM

Testimony from the field...

In August 2025, David Peña, a medical technician at the Austin VA, spoke with the [Texas Observer](#):

Peña has been seeing a VA mental health practitioner to cope with past and present stressors, but he now says he has to wait six months (compared to three months last year) for an appointment. He compared what's happening at the VA to a flawed repair. "It's like patchwork," he said. "You try to cut holes in the wall, and eventually, the dam's gonna break."

Directly from veterans...

"I had a 30 minute onboarding appointment with a psychologist in March. This was a telehealth appointment and she took it from her home. Her next available appointment was in late July, which I took and decided to wait for because I liked her as a provider. My local clinic recently cancelled my appointment, and today I was told that it's because she is the only psychologist who was serving our area and is leaving the VA."

—Veteran
July 2025

THE STAFFING CRISIS

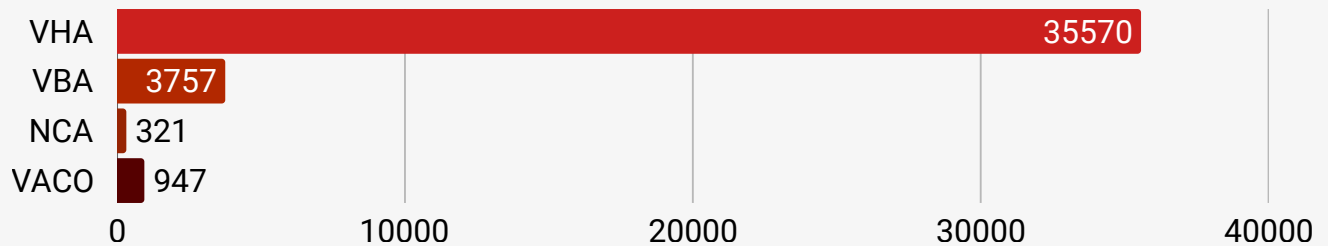
VA is Congressionally mandated to publish certain hiring data publicly each quarter. The contrast between the state of VA’s workforce in January 2025 and September 2025 illustrates the catastrophic impact Trump and Collins have had on VA’s ability to recruit and retain the employees the Department needs to provide veterans with their earned care and benefits.

The Department is no longer reporting its comprehensive time-to-hire data –electing instead to only post its ‘merit-based’ time-to-hire. There is no information on what constitutes a ‘merit-based’ hire or how many new hires are included in this calculation. Collins seems to have abandoned a decades-long effort to reduce VA’s overall time-to-hire.

VA LOST MORE THAN 40,000 EMPLOYEES IN FISCAL YEAR 2025.

This represents the first year the Department has experienced a net *loss* of employees. **Eighty-eight percent were health care staff.**

Number of VA Employees Lost in Fiscal Year 2025



After decades of work to improve VA’s status as a preferred employer and increase the number of quality applicants, facilities’ ability to recruit and retain have plummeted at unprecedented rates.



‘Sense of doom’: Morale plunges as some VA health workers fear worsening shortages, staffing cuts

By Brian Todd, CNN

© 10 min read · Published 6:00 AM EDT, Tue July 1, 2025

TEXAS OBSERVER

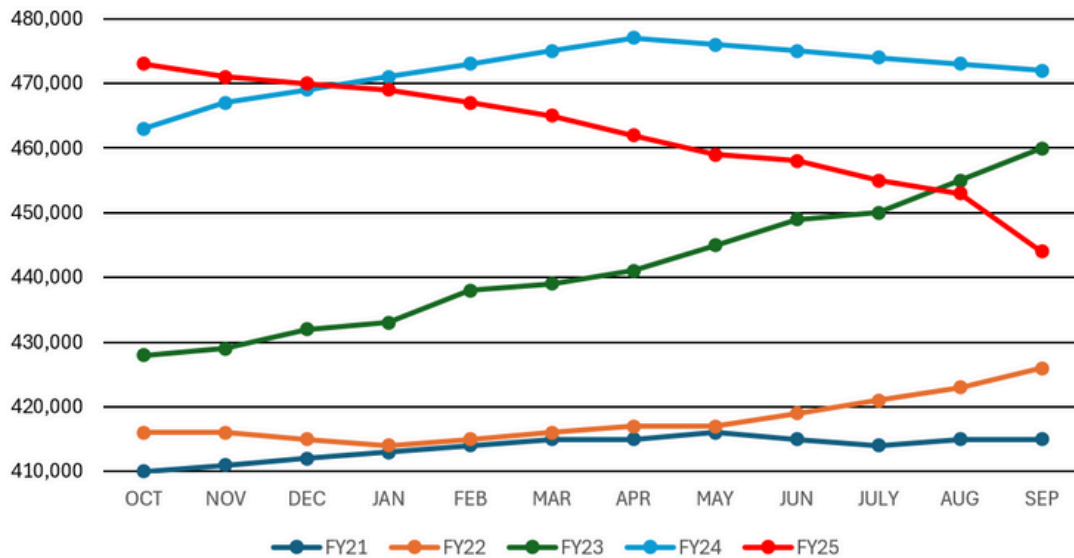
VETERANS WHO WORK IN TEXAS VA HEALTH SYSTEM: ‘THE DAM’S GONNA BREAK’

Some vets say they’re being hurt as both workers and patients by Trump administration staffing decisions.

by **JOSEPHINE LEE**

AUGUST 5, 2025, 7:14 AM, CDT

VA Cumulative Onboard Employees
as of September 30, 2025



VA offers exit surveys to employees as they leave the Department. Some of the results are summarized and included in VA's workforce dashboard. The year over year comparisons from September 30, 2024, versus September 30, 2025, show a disturbing trend that indicates the mass exodus of employees will continue and the inability of the Department to recruit and retain high-quality talent may soon become insurmountable.

In less than a year, the overall percentage of employees who would recommend VA as a good place to work fell ten percent, from 82 percent in 2024 to 76 percent in 2025. Nearly every category of employees noted "desired work schedule not offered," which would include inability to telework, as a primary reason for leaving—a reason completely absent from the top exit survey results from 2024. This data paints a grim picture for VA's ability to recover and recruit for the positions the Department has lost as Trump and Collins continue to degrade and retaliate against federal employees.

Testimony from the field...

"My team was understaffed and it has gotten worse with the deferred resignation and many staff looking for positions elsewhere... We cannot backfill because of the hiring freeze... The facility as a whole is understaffed, we lost hundreds of employees to DRP, resignations, retirements, and probationary firings over the past few months. Some services have lost up to 11 staff members [almost a whole service] and cannot backfill the positions because of the hiring freeze."

—VHA Human Resources employee, Texas
March 19, 2025

Based on more detailed reports from whistleblowers within the Department, VA's workforce capacity is dire. In fiscal year 2025, the Department lost countless employees whose positions have yet to be backfilled.

1,000 PHYSICIANS

The workload for a primary care provider at VA is supposed to be approximately 1,200 patients. Specialty providers often have higher caseloads because they see their patients less frequently. Therefore, an estimated more than 1,200,000 veteran patients lost their provider since Trump took office.

1,500 SCHEDULERS

Medical Support Assistants (MSAs or schedulers) are essential for veterans to arrange both direct care and community care appointments. They have long been one of VA's hardest-to-hire positions with high turnover. The net loss of more than 1,500 in fiscal year 2025 is unprecedented and shameful.

3,000 REGISTERED NURSES

As with schedulers and physicians, registered nurses (RN) have also experienced net increases at VA year after year due to increasing demand for care—until fiscal year 2025. This loss reverts VA's RN workforce back to fiscal year 2023 levels despite the Department having enrolled more than 700,000 new veteran patients in that time.

S. 1068 Putting Veterans First Act

On March 13, 2025, in response to President Donald Trump's mass terminations of federal veteran employees and egregious attempts to slash VA care and benefits, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) led a group of his colleagues in introducing the Putting Veterans First Act—comprehensive legislation to protect veterans, military spouses, and VA employees indiscriminately targeted in DOGE cuts at VA and across the federal government.

The Putting Veterans First Act is co-sponsored by Senators Sanders (I-VT), Duckworth (D-IL), Gillibrand (D-NY), Gallego (D-AZ), Kaine (D-VA), Rosen (D-NV), Cortez Masto (D-NV), Schiff (D-CA), Merkley (D-OR), Klobuchar (D-MN), Padilla (D-CA), Hirono (D-HI), Kelly (D-AZ), Booker (D-NJ), Heinrich (D-NM), Whitehouse (D-RI), Luján (D-NM), Hickenlooper (D-CO) and Wyden (D-OR).

The Partnership for Public Service estimates firings, re-hirings, lost productivity, and paid administrative leave for thousands of workers cut by DOGE will **cost taxpayers more than \$135 billion.**

“Ultimately it’s the public that will end up paying for this.”



Max Stier, CEO
Partnership for Public Service

VA Hiring FY24 vs. FY25

(09/01/2024-09/30/2024 as compared to 09/01/2025-09/30/2025)

Same Period Last Year (SPLY)



-22.6% SPLY
Announcements



-40.7% SPLY
Applications



-27.7% SPLY
Certificates



-38.2% SPLY
Selections



-46.3% SPLY
Entries on Duty

The New York Times

Veterans Are Caught Up in Trump’s and Musk’s Work Force Overhaul

Nearly 30 percent of civil service employees in the federal government are veterans. Democrats are highlighting their firings by taking some as guests to President Trump’s address on Tuesday.

By **Eileen Sullivan** and **Maya C. Miller**

Reporting from Washington

March 4, 2025



FEDERAL NEWS NETWORK

Despite exemptions, VA employees still feeling impact from policies shaking up federal workforce

Jory Heckman | @jheckmanWFED

February 14, 2025 6:25 pm 9 min read

Testimony from the field...

“Regardless of what Collins may say, if any VBA claims processors are RIF’d, veteran care will absolutely suffer. And the job takes more than a year to get the hang of if they decide to hire people after the fact (unlikely). He likes to brag about ‘the backlog’ without mentioning the mandatory overtime costing more money than hiring additional claims processors, and at the potential cost of the quality metric of performance standards.”

—VBA employee
June 2025

“The ongoing hiring freeze has severely limited our ability to onboard healthcare providers and those who support [them]. Healthcare providers and some support personnel are on the exemption list, however, the freeze has severely slowed down the hiring timetable. Human Resources is not in the exempt list and we continue to lose personnel which make it hard to support the VA healthcare requirements.”

—VA Human Resources employee, Illinois
March 2025

PART TWO: UNPRECEDENTED CUTS TO CARE AND BENEFITS

Before President Trump took office for his second term, VA expanded hiring in response to the historic surge in demand for PACT Act-related care and benefits, which resulted in more veterans using VA than ever before. Wait times for care decreased in 2024, while the number of new patient appointments increased by 11 percent. Repeatedly, Collins has publicly claimed his policies will not result in any cuts to services or benefits for veterans. However, the data, the feedback from veterans and VA employees across the country, and the underlying reality of the situation suggest otherwise.

As previously outlined, Collins’ policies have already increased workloads, administrative demands, and burnout across the entire VA workforce. These effects have trickled down to everyday interactions with veterans and their families in VA facilities across the country.

In addition, Collins has drastically scaled back outreach to veterans on critical VA programs and initiatives such as the PACT Act. And his policies are aggressively pushing more and more veterans into the private sector for care even when it is not as timely or as high quality as VA direct care, or the preference of the veteran. His Administration has also made unprecedented cuts impacting life-saving VA research and clinical trials, abruptly cancelled a critical program that kept tens of thousands of veterans in their homes, rolled back presumptive benefits to some toxic-exposed veterans while denying new presumptive benefits to others, and gutted a number of support programs relied upon by millions of veterans and their families.

These actions raise serious questions regarding whether the Trump-Collins VA can provide the high level of care and benefits an increasing number of veterans deserve and have earned.

Total New Veterans Health Care Enrollees

● Sept. 2023 - Sept. 2024 ● Sept. 2024 - Sept. 2025



ATTACKS ON VA RESEARCH, CURTAILING INNOVATION FOR ALL AMERICANS

“We do not have any paused clinical trials due to hiring freezes or exemptions.”

— John Bartrum, Nominee for Under Secretary for Health
Current Senior Advisor to Collins on VA health care matters
July 23, 2025

The Trump-Collins VA workforce policies have had a disproportionate impact on VA’s research enterprise—which has long been a pillar of medical innovation, responsible for groundbreaking advancements that have improved the lives of millions of veterans and Americans. It is also a major recruitment tool in bringing top talent to the Department. Researchers at VA have been responsible for revolutionary medical achievements, including implanting the first successful cardiac pacemaker, developing the nicotine patch and other therapies for smokers, maintaining the nation’s largest genomic biorepository, and advancing prosthetics technology.

PROPUBLICA

Staffing shortage leading to stopping clinical trials during the intervention period is unsafe and threatens harm to the Veterans participating in those studies. This has impacted multiple facilities. VA Pittsburgh alone lost over 20 research staff due to the hiring freeze and 7 clinical trials stopped enrollment including in metastatic head & neck cancer and advanced lung cancer. VA Pittsburgh will lose another 30 research staff in March, and over a hundred in the next 6 months, leading to further cessation of clinical trials.

VA employees in Pittsburgh sent a warning that they had lost research staff because of the hiring freeze. Obtained and highlighted by ProPublica

VISN 20 received notification that the contract for their Cancer Registry underwent review by DOGE and was “updated for immediate termination.” A Cancer Registry is required by the National Commission on Cancer accreditation for “Comprehensive Cancer Centers,” for required state reporting, and for enrolling patients into cancer treatment clinical trials.

Officials at the VA centers in the Pacific Northwest said funding for their cancer research was “updated for immediate termination” after a review by the Department of Government Efficiency. Obtained by ProPublica

VA research staff often work on two- or three-year appointments called “not to exceed” contracts, which are typically rolled over into new appointments as long as the researcher has funding.

Due to the Trump hiring freeze, essential researchers whose terms were ending were shown the door and forced to abandon lifesaving work, and their positions were unable to be backfilled. These actions directly damaged veterans’ access to cutting-edge treatments and clinical trials, including cancer trials.

Though Collins eventually requested exemptions from the hiring freeze for some VA research staff, a number of issues remain. The majority of researchers terminated during the hiring freeze have only recently been offered reinstatement by the Department, after their studies have been understaffed for months or abandoned completely. In addition, VA research staff nationwide reported a significant backlog in the hiring process for critical research employees who are finally, after months of waiting, no longer subject to the hiring freeze.

At the same time, the National Institutes of Health cut grants for multiple VA research studies, and VA research projects associated with partners such as Harvard University—including studies on veteran suicide prevention, toxic exposure, and prostate cancer screening—have been proposed for termination. Concurrently, VA physicians and scientists are being ordered not to publish in medical journals without first seeking clearance from Trump political appointees. Critical research and the best interests of veterans should never suffer from unprecedented partisan attacks against research and academia.

TASK & PURPOSE

As the VA celebrates 100 years of medical research, the very people doing that job are being fired

PATTY NIEBERG / FEB 24, 2025 11:01 AM EST

The Guardian ^{US}

Trump news at a glance: veterans affairs department muzzled after critical article

VA physicians and scientists ordered not to publish in medical journals without seeking clearance from Trump appointees. Key US politics stories from Sunday 1 June

Letters to the Administration...

July 18, 2025

*“We also urge you to work with the Office of Personnel Management to quickly address the backlog in research staff hiring that your hiring freeze has engendered. VA research staff nationwide are reporting a significant backlog in the hiring process for critical research employees who are finally, after months of waiting, no longer subject to your hiring freeze. **Failure to swiftly address this backlog will put veterans’ health at risk, decimate the morale of an already understaffed research workforce, and undercut one of VA’s best recruiting tools.**”*

Signed,

Senators Blumenthal, Murray, and Gallego

DETERIORATION OF CARE: TANGIBLE IMPACTS OF CUTS

- Increased backlog for x-rays due to radiologist resignations.
- Closed acute care at rural hospitals due to a nurse shortage.
- Cancelled transportation services for disabled veterans reduced access to both emergent and routine medical appointments.
- Critical research employees on a study predicting stroke risk were unable to renew their position appointments, stopping the study.
- Delayed openings for new clinics because VA cannot hire the necessary staff to open their doors, including a VA clinic in Fredericksburg, Virginia.
- Cut therapy groups for veterans who had experienced significant and targeted trauma. Slashed music therapy to treat PTSD.
- Halted a substance use disorder study due to an employee's termination, leaving progress stalled.
- Turned veterans away from a clinical trial aimed at preventing dementia and heart disease, due to a research employee not having their appointment renewed.
- Delayed enrollment in clinical trials for advanced cancers, limiting access to promising therapies.
- Terminated eight researchers at the Puget Sound VA who studied topics such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and opioid over-prescription.
- Cancelled or proposed to cancel multiple VA research projects at Harvard—including one on veteran suicide prevention.
- Instituted copays for whole health classes and programs linked to improving mental health and preventing injuries, creating an unnecessary barrier for veterans to access this critical care. This follows the Trump-Collins VA withdrawing the Biden Administration's efforts to permanently exempt these services from copay requirements.

DETERIORATION OF CARE

Under the Biden Administration, VA led a massive expansion in telehealth to provide greater convenience and accessibility for veterans—leading to a 92 percent satisfaction rating and 12 percent increase in telehealth use by veterans in fiscal year 2025.

Prior to Trump's second term, more women veterans than ever before were also coming to VA—more than 53,000 women veterans enrolled in VA health care between May 2023 and May 2024, marking a 20 percent increase over the previous year and the largest enrollment year for women veterans on record.

Under the Biden VA, veteran homelessness reached record lows, a 55.6 percent reduction since 2010. VA helped veterans remain homeowners by guarantying over 416,300 home loans, saving more than 158,000 borrowers from foreclosure, and approving 2,439 Specially Adapted Housing grants.

Despite assurances from Collins that his cuts have no impact on care, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs has received first-hand reports of the impacts of his actions on care, including:



Closing Hospital Beds: VA hospitals have been forced to reduce the availability of inpatient, recovery, emergency-room, and long-term care beds.



Endangering At-Risk Veterans: On March 17, Collins rescinded a directive providing for the availability of gender-affirming care through VA and the respectful delivery of health care to transgender veterans. Transgender veterans die by suicide at almost six times the rate of the general population, and studies have shown access to gender-affirming health care reduces suicidality and the rate of suicide attempts post-treatment.



Worsening Access to Mental Health Care: Seven of twelve mental health providers left the Ventura VA outpatient clinic in California, citing return-to-office mandates. Wait times for new patients seeking mental health services at this facility skyrocketed to 121 days.



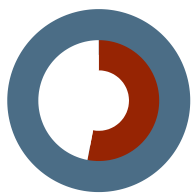
Increasing Staff Shortages: Staff shortages have left doctors and nurses servicing their own medical equipment and scheduling patient appointments. The ordering of supplies and equipment came to a halt, according to a doctor at a VA hospital in the Midwest. A VA nurse in Georgia told CNN shortages are so bad they are low on portable jugs to collect urine from patients and there are no appropriate staff to bring them to each unit.

THREATS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

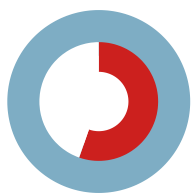
On December 31, 2025, the Trump-Collins VA published a final rule rolling back veterans' and CHAMPVA beneficiaries' access to abortion care. This rule reinstates a near-total ban on abortion care and counseling through VA for veterans and CHAMPVA beneficiaries, allowing only a narrow exception for life endangerment. Its publication ends a three-year period during which veterans and CHAMPVA beneficiaries could access abortion counseling and care in cases of rape, incest, or life or health endangerment.

The Biden Administration issued the rule allowing this critical care in September 2022 in response to the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which created urgent and heightened risks to the lives and health of pregnant veterans and CHAMPVA beneficiaries living in states that banned or severely restricted access to abortion.

With this rule change, Collins is putting political allegiances and culture wars before VA's sacred obligation to deliver life-saving health care to more than 462,000 women veterans of reproductive age enrolled in VA health care. More than half of these women live in states that have enacted abortion bans or restrictions. Should their health be in jeopardy or if they are raped, they will have no options for reproductive counseling or care.



462,000 women veterans of reproductive age are enrolled in VA health care. **232,000** of whom live in states with abortion bans or restrictions.



112,000 women of reproductive age are enrolled in CHAMPVA. **62,000** of whom live in states with abortion bans or restrictions

“The government should not be able to impose a pregnancy on anyone— least of all survivors of rape, abuse, or those whose health is at risk...It is disgusting and dangerous that the Trump Administration will strip VA’s ability to provide essential health care to veterans in these harrowing situations. It is a harmful and reckless move that reneges on the Department’s promise to provide every veteran the health care they earned and deserve. We cannot let VA stop providing this care to veterans by ripping away this narrow, targeted protection. I will be fighting as hard and long as possible to reverse this cruel, dangerous new policy.”

—Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal

DISMANTLING PROTECTIONS FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

Through the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program, VA supports community organizations that provide housing and vital services for veterans experiencing homelessness. This program is a lifeline for roughly 25,000 veterans each year. In January, Congress directed VA to increase the reimbursement for organizations serving homeless veterans through the GPD program.

Despite clear bipartisan direction and repeated assurances implementation would be immediate, VA has failed to give homeless veteran service providers the increased funds required by the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act of 2025. In this legislation, Congress mandated higher per diem rates to reimburse providers who operate in high-cost areas, serve veterans with extensive care needs, or offer expanded services. While VA raised the base rate in September, it has not implemented the full range of higher payments—up to 200 percent of the State Home Domiciliary Rate.

Letters to the Administration...

November 21, 2025

“For months, the Department has provided assurances that this bipartisan priority would be implemented as soon as possible. Now, nearly a year later, you continue to withhold these critical funds and undercut the very lifeline that supports nearly 25,000 veterans in their greatest time of need.”

Signed,

Senator Blumenthal and Representative Takano

Testimony from the field...

“We are struggling to provide the veterans we serve with the care they need to move forward because it is costing more to meet their basic needs than the VA is paying us. We need the VA to fulfill this commitment to veterans and the organizations that serve them to continue to provide quality case management services and to help veterans find safe, affordable, permanent housing. The current situation isn't sustainable for us and many other agencies in high-cost areas around the country.”

—Vince Santilli, CEO, Homes for the Brave



Shelters for CT's homeless veterans say VA is icing them out of funding

John Craven • Dec 5, 2025, 4:51 PM



Connecticut lawmakers push VA to increase funding for homeless veterans

Author: Priscilla Meza

Published: 8:16 PM EST December 5, 2025

Nearly 1,000 beds for homeless veterans have been lost nationwide after 74 GPD grantees withdrew from the GPD program since the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency, which temporarily increased funding.

VA's failure to act is a clear violation of Congressional intent and continues to jeopardize critical services for homeless veterans nationwide.

Additionally, in November, the Trump Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) cut \$2.2 billion—roughly 70 percent—from programs that provide supportive housing and rapid rehousing for people with complex needs. These programs operate under the Housing First model, an evidence-based approach that prioritizes permanent housing without imposing preconditions such as sobriety or mandatory treatment. HUD was also given the ability to deny grants to organizations that acknowledge transgender or nonbinary individuals—veterans already at higher risk of homelessness.

The cuts come despite the well-documented challenges facing homeless veterans: roughly half experience serious mental health conditions, and about 70 percent live with substance use disorders. By eliminating funding for programs designed to meet veterans where they are, these reductions jeopardize those who are not sober or “treatment-ready” and threaten to push many out of housing and away from essential supportive services.

Directly from veterans...

“Forced sobriety is going to be the biggest barrier to entry for a lot of people — if you have to be sober to go in, in my experience, it’s very, very unlikely to happen.”

—Army Ranger Jade Lane, 41

After being injured in friendly fire in 2004, Mr. Lane developed an addiction to Percocet, eventually began using heroin, and later cycled through short jail stints and periods of homelessness, often living on beaches or in national parks.

He reported that he was only able to stop using drugs after he moved into VA housing offered without any preconditions.

HUD has claimed its new policies will include specific protections for veterans, yet none have been detailed—only sweeping cuts to long-standing, effective housing programs.

Local and state governments, along with nonprofit providers, are fighting back with two separate lawsuits. Just weeks after HUD announced plans to slash supportive housing and rapid-rehousing services, a coalition of attorneys general and governors from 20 states sued the Trump Administration. They argue the changes abandon the proven Housing First model and could force thousands—including people currently stable in permanent housing—back into homelessness. Soon after, a second lawsuit from nonprofit organizations and seven local governments argued the abrupt policy shift will leave programs entirely unfunded or without federal support for at least five months.

The New York Times

Trump's Get-Tough Approach on Homelessness May Sweep Up Veterans

The administration has pledged to end support for Housing First, the approach behind the V.A.'s greatest housing success story.

By [Ellen Barry](#) Aug. 19, 2025



US states sue to block Trump administration from restricting homelessness funding

By [Daniel Wiessner](#)

November 25, 2025 2:43 PM EST - Updated November 25, 2025

POLITICO

Trump administration policy change makes deep cuts to homeless permanent housing program

More than half of the 2026 funding for the program will be shifted from permanent housing to transitional housing with work and service requirements.

By [KATHERINE HAPGOOD](#)

11/13/2025 02:50 PM EST

Testimony from the field...

“There is no doubt that it will cause homelessness to rise across this nation. At a time when we should all be focused on scaling up and improving our most effective programs, this administration is instead focused on tearing them down.”

—Ann Oliva, CEO, National Alliance to End Homelessness, and one of the plaintiffs

BENEFITS: PRODUCTION AT THE COST OF QUALITY

“As a Veteran and federal employee, this withdrawal ‘down sizing’ the VA affects my medical care in getting appointments with my provider in a timely manner. In the matter of workload, in determining Veteran’s benefits, it adds additional stress as need to reduce the back log does not seem feasible with a smaller workforce, as we are now being pushed to move claims faster to meet the standards our director has outlined with a smaller staff.”

—Veteran and VBA employee

Collins frequently touts his Administration’s role in reducing the inventory of backlogged disability claims. While it’s true Collins has sustained much of the previous Administration’s progress in reducing the claims backlog, it’s also true the Trump-Collins VA has not instituted any new policies that have directly contributed to increased claims processing efficiency.

In fact, the Trump-Collins hiring freeze, return-to-office policy, DRP, cancelled contracts, rush to adopt automation, and increased production quotas are demoralizing the VBA workforce and prioritizing quantity over the quality of claims decisions. The Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs verified first-hand reports from VBA staff that senior claims processing personnel responsible for coaching newer employees are now processing claims instead of conducting trainings, assisting Veterans Service Representatives, or conducting quality reviews instead of their normal job duties.

As a result, the number of veterans asking VA to take a second look at their claim has increased by 44 percent because of errors made by claims processors who have been forced to prioritize quantity over quality to meet new higher production quotas with fewer staff. More than 95,200 higher level review requests are currently pending—an increase of 29,000 since January 2025.

The previous Administration achieved record-breaking levels of claims production through innovative workforce policies and the aggressive recruitment of new claims processors. For instance, it made a deliberate decision to end mandatory overtime, recognizing it was unsustainable and contributing to workforce burnout. The Trump Administration has since reinstated mandatory overtime, which has resulted in claims processors losing their sense of mission and leaving the Department in droves. Between January 31 and September 30, 2025, VBA lost 3,206 employees—of those, 2,000 were mission critical occupations including more than 1,500 claims examiners. Almost none of those positions were backfilled.

CHIPPING AWAY AT EARNED BENEFITS: TANGIBLE IMPACTS OF CUTS

Increased Wait Times for Legacy Appeals: The average number of days veterans are waiting after filing a notice they disagree with a decision on a legacy appeal is now 3,541. That is 952 days more than in January 2025.

Cancelled Program Helping Thousands of Veterans Stay in Their Homes: Collins abruptly announced the closure of the Veterans Affairs Servicing Purchase Program (VASP), leaving tens of thousands of veterans at risk for foreclosure without an option of last resort.

Improper Reliance on AI Tools: The Trump Administration has expanded the use of automation tools, despite the need to ensure they are assisting rather than impeding claims processing. For example, claims processors report reviewing claims riddled with errors because they were never touched by a human despite being marked as ready for a definitive decision.

Fired or Lost VBA Employees: More than 4,500 VBA employees have left their positions and regional offices are struggling to replace lost capabilities. Nearly half of VBA's 50 Regional Office Directors have quit or retired.

Prevented VA from Addressing Racial Disparities: On March 13, Collins shuttered the Office of Equity Assurance, responsible for efforts to eliminate disparities in the VA benefits claims process, despite recent findings of significant racial disparities.

Abandoned Student Veterans: On March 10, Trump issued an executive order closing the Department of Education, which conducts regulatory oversight of predatory schools seeking to defraud student veterans of their GI Bill benefits, and provides critical financial support to student veteran support programs.

Failure to pay VA education benefits: An estimated 75,000 students were left without their anticipated Dependents Educational Assistance, Post 9/11 GI Bill and VR&E payments due to infrastructure and personnel failures by the Department in Fall 2025. VA did not provide any warning to veterans and their families about the missed payments, leading many students into severe financial hardship.

ONE BIG BETRAYAL: FURTHER HARM TO VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

H.R. 1, Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill," which was signed into law in July, included drastic cuts to Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Specifically, the bill cut nearly \$1 trillion from Medicaid and CHIP and \$186 billion from SNAP. Four million veteran family members are enrolled in Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program.

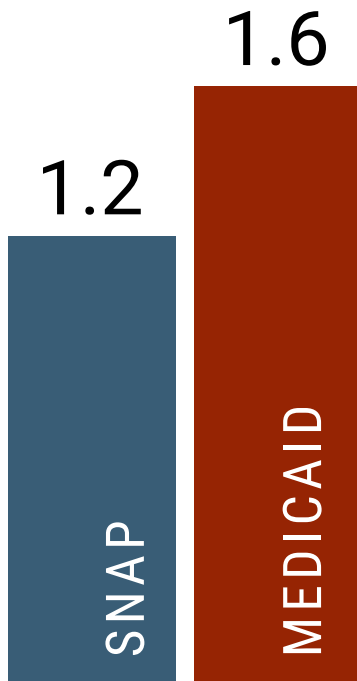
VA recently estimated approximately 80 percent of its enrollees rely upon other health care coverage to meet their needs, so Republican attacks on health care, including these cuts in H.R. 1, will negatively impact millions of veterans and their families across the country.

- Approximately 40 percent of veterans, including 1 in 25 women veterans, use Medicaid as their only health care coverage.
- Since enactment of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the number of uninsured nonelderly veterans has decreased from 9.6 percent to 5.9 percent.
- H.R. 1 has subjected more than 12,000 veterans who reside in community nursing homes to inadequate nursing staffing levels.
- With nearly half of rural hospitals operating in the red, these unwarranted and unprecedented Medicaid cuts will lead to the closure of countless facilities across the country—leaving rural veterans without any access to emergency care and limited or no options for care in their community when it cannot be provided directly by VA in a timely manner.
- From 2017 to 2019, SNAP helped roughly 1.2 million low-income veterans access food. In a blow to veterans, H.R. 1 cut \$186 billion in federal spending on SNAP and imposed new so-called work requirements that do not exempt many disabled veterans. Working-age veterans are already 7.4 percent more likely to face food insecurity than their non-veteran peers.

If veterans are no longer able to access these other health care coverage sources, VA is likely to see an influx of new enrollees or current enrollees relying on VA for a greater portion of their health care. VA’s actuarial firm has indicated that for every one percent increase in reliance on VA care, VA can expect its costs to rise by \$2.6 billion.

At the end of 2025, Trump and Congressional Republicans let ACA premium tax credits expire. An estimated **267,000 veterans**, who are not eligible for other types of coverage, lost their only option for affordable health insurance and are going without critical medical care.

Veterans Dependent on Medicaid and SNAP (in millions)



Note: SNAP estimate is for veterans with SNAP assistance (own or household) in the last 12 months. Medicaid estimate is for individuals currently enrolled in Medicaid and living outside of institutional settings.

Source: Based on CBPP estimates using 2021 to 2023 data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey.

STARS AND STRIPES

Advocacy group warns new work requirements and eligibility rules for Medicaid could create hardships for veterans

By LINDA F. HERSEY
STARS AND STRIPES • July 10, 2025

NEWSNATION

Veterans may be denied food stamps under Trump’s new tax law

[Safia Samee Ali](#)
Updated: AUG 13, 2025 / 01:56 PM CDT

STARS AND STRIPES

‘We won’t be able to make ends meet’: Congress proposes tighter rules for food assistance for veterans

By LINDA F. HERSEY
STARS AND STRIPES • June 30, 2025

2025 Budget Impacts: House Bill Would Cut Assistance and Raise Costs for Veterans



DEFRAUDING VETERANS

“Complaints to CFPB from servicemembers, veterans, and their families just crossed the 400,000 mark. Last year, the CFPB saw total complaints from the military community increase by 27 percent from 2022 and 98 percent compared to 2021—with complaints ranging from credit reporting errors to mortgage problems to financial fraud and scams.”

—Office of Servicemember Affairs
CFPB
May 23, 2024

Since its creation, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has recovered more than \$180 million from financial predators who have defrauded veterans, servicemembers, and their families. Nevertheless, Trump insists on gutting efforts to protect veterans from financial fraud—including mortgage scams, payday lending, high-rate auto loans and fraudulent student loans, as well as excessive credit card late fees, bank account overdraft charges, and other predatory tactics by big banks.

Coupled with Trump’s efforts to completely dismantle CFPB, H.R. 1 reduced its funding by nearly 50 percent. With a critical mission to protect veterans and servicemembers from an array of financial fraud, kneecapping CFPB is harmful and leaves veterans more vulnerable to fraud.

Military.com

This Watchdog Agency Shielded Troops and Veterans from Fraud. Musk and Trump Just Gutted It.

Military.com | By Patricia Kime

Published February 13, 2025 at 4:54pm ET

Letters to the Administration...

February 20, 2025

*“We write today to demand you immediately restart operations at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and stop enabling President Trump and unelected billionaire Elon Musk’s **bad-faith effort to dismantle this critical consumer-protection agency.** These short-sighted actions leave servicemembers and Veterans—who are among the likeliest group to be targeted for financial crimes—vulnerable to fraud and abuse.”*

Signed,

Senators Blumenthal, Duckworth, and Hirono

PART THREE: CONTRACTS IN CHAOS

VA manages one of the largest procurement operations in the federal government. Under the guise of reform, Collins and Musk took a wrecking ball to VA’s integral contracts. Employing a flawed AI model from DOGE, they cancelled approximately 2,000 contracts and let another 14,000 expire without plans for renewal or replacement services. In doing so, they hastily and recklessly terminated direct services for veterans and VA operations including suicide prevention and mental health treatment; disability claims processing, exams, and auditing; radiology services; outreach regarding burial benefits and health care services; and contracts to conduct oversight activities to identify and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.

To make matters worse, many of the contracts cancelled by Collins were held by veteran-owned small businesses—firms that deliver veteran-informed services, employ veterans, and play a critical role in supporting VA’s mission.

When the true nature of the impacts of these mass contract cancellations was exposed, Collins reversed some cancellations and concealed information about the process from the public. Public records, press accounts, and Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs investigations reveal a troubling pattern: while some contract cancellations were paused and others reversed, many remain in effect. The full impact remains unknown, because Collins has ignored multiple bipartisan requests to share a complete list of cancelled contracts, brief the Committee, or provide any detailed strategic justification for their cancellation.



 = 100 CANCELLED CONTRACTS

Letters to the Administration...

March 11, 2025

"...Carrying out such arbitrary cuts and contract cancellations under the excuse of eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse is exactly the form of cynical action that prioritizes talking points over helping the veterans who have honorably served the American people..."

Signed,

Senators Blumenthal, Schumer, Booker, Cantwell, Durbin, Heinrich, Kaine, Klobuchar, Luján, Merkley, Padilla, Rosen, Schiff, Shaheen, Warren, Welch, and Wyden



Paul Windle for ProPublica

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. He and two other lawmakers said that despite repeated requests, the Department of Veterans Affairs has disclosed incomplete and inaccurate lists that failed to specify exactly which contracts have been canceled. Illustration by Paul Windle for ProPublica. Photo by Daniel Heuer/Bloomberg via Getty Images.

PROPUBLICA

DOGE Developed Error-Prone AI Tool to “Munch” Veterans Affairs Contracts

by [Brandon Roberts](#), [Vernal Coleman](#) and [Eric Umansky](#)

June 6, 2025, 5 a.m. EDT

Inside the AI Prompts DOGE Used to “Munch” Contracts Related to Veterans’ Health

by [Brandon Roberts](#) and [Vernal Coleman](#)

June 6, 2025, 5:05 a.m. EDT

Senators Demand Transparency on Canceled Veterans Affairs Contracts

by [Brandon Roberts](#) and [Vernal Coleman](#)

June 11, 2025, 12:15 p.m. EDT

The Washington Post
DOGE to cancel government contracts that help veterans, records show

By [Emily Davies](#) and [Hannah Natanson](#)

Military.com

VA Shuffles Money from Canceled Contracts While Keeping Congress Mostly in the Dark

Military.com | By [Rebecca Kheel](#)

Published May 21, 2025 at 5:30pm ET

ALL SLASHING—NO STRATEGIZING

“The termination of these contracts will not negatively affect Veteran care, benefits or services.”

—VA press release
March 5, 2025

Under the banner of eliminating “waste, fraud, and abuse,” Collins weaponized DOGE to recklessly cancel contracts with little to no input from VA subject matter experts or regard to veteran impact—including one, ironically, focused on rooting out waste at VA. What was pitched as a cleanup effort became a demolition of essential services.

To this day, VA has refused to explain how it will replace any cancelled services—leaving serious gaps in care for veterans and in the ability of hospitals and facilities to run smoothly. The following charts list the care and services cancelled by Collins and Musk most likely to cause significant, irreparable harm to veterans.

HEALTH CARE

cancer and tumor registries
community care
digital health services
electronic health record
modernization
geriatric and extended care
medical research
nurse training
patient safety monitoring
prosthetics
PTSD outreach
suicide prevention
transplant services
women’s health

BENEFITS

automated benefits
technology
cemetery management
education
disability claims
processing
DoD-VA transition support
homeless programs office
support
PACT Act implementation
small business leadership

ANCILLARY SERVICES

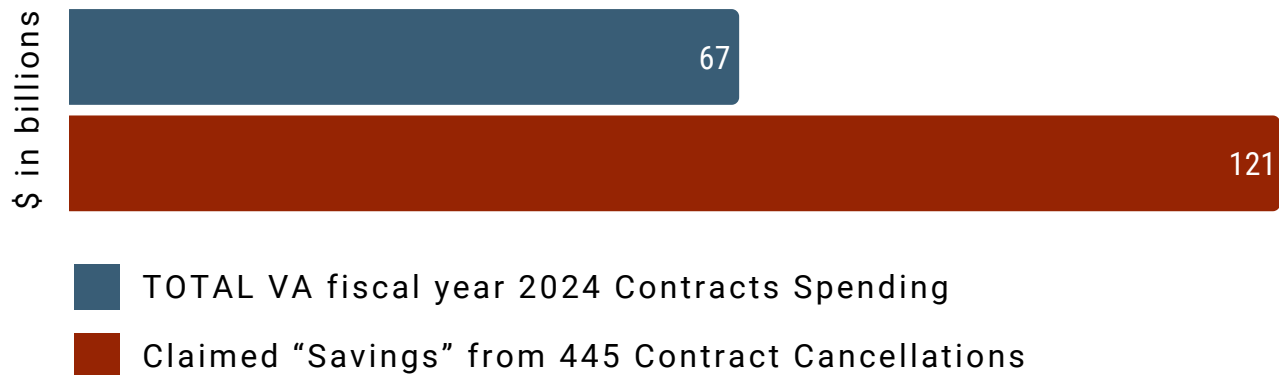
chaplains
emergency response
services
facility management
human resources
logistics
infrastructure and
construction
security and identity
protection
waste, fraud, and abuse
detection

FALSE SAVINGS

In addition to cancelling critical contracts, an exhaustive media investigation revealed Collins and his team provided inaccurate and misleading information to the public on the “savings” generated by these cancellations. In fact, VA’s savings calculations were off by tens of billions of dollars - calling into question the validity of any savings it has claimed from cancelled contracts.

In May, VA claimed to have saved \$120.8 billion, more than the entirety of total VA contract spending in FY 2024, by cancelling 445 contracts. One contract for “program management and support” was worth \$84.9 million, but VA inflated its value to an astronomical \$44.8 billion.

At least 80 contracts Collins claimed to cancel were terminated under the previous Administration between 2021-2024.



Directly from veterans...

“No more cuts. As a veteran who uses the VA healthcare system I am very concerned additional cuts will significantly negatively impact VA healthcare accessibility and quality. I feel the cuts are indiscriminate, cuts only to make cuts. Doesn’t seem there is leadership conducting an analysis. An indication of this, are the rescinded contracts. The leadership claims this will save millions, then a few days later it is decided the contracts are considered essential and reinstated.”

We deserve a VA healthcare system that is not used as a political chess piece.”

—Illinois veteran
March 3, 2025

PART FOUR: UNDERMINING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

VA has long maintained a strong record of transparency and proactive engagement with Congress and the veterans it serves. That standard has deteriorated sharply under Collins, despite claims during his confirmation hearing to the contrary. By all accounts, VA's communication has become delayed, evasive, and insufficient—failing to meet the basic expectations of accountability. Regular briefings to Congress, VSOs, and key stakeholders have been cut back or cancelled altogether on critical issues such as caregiver support and community care.

Instead of fostering open dialogue, Collins has empowered a cadre of political appointees who have stonewalled Congressional oversight and obstructed routine engagement with members—particularly Democrats. In one striking example, VA denied Senator Patty Murray's request to host a town hall at VA on the unique needs of women veterans. It then declined an invitation to participate when the town hall was moved off VA property. This pattern reflects not just neglect, but a deliberate and unprecedented retreat from accountability and public trust.

Moreover, Collins has aggressively politicized the information provided by VA to the public about his reckless actions, and unabashedly attacked the media for holding him and the Administration accountable. Never has a sitting VA Secretary been so hostile to the First Amendment, transparency, and accountability. The previous Secretary, Denis McDonough, held monthly press conferences open to all members of the media, and he did so for the entirety of the Biden Administration. In contrast, Collins has yet to hold a single press conference open to all members of the media at VA headquarters.

Letters to the Administration...

July 3, 2025

*"...Beyond the Department's obstruction of Congress, VA has also denied basic Freedom of Information Act requests, insisted media outlets change evidence-based reporting without substantive proof to support those requests, and restricted Veteran Service Organizations' access to the Department if they raise legitimate questions about Department actions that could harm veterans and their families. This **vindictive secrecy** is unprecedented, and demonstrates your consistent unwillingness to allow anyone to hold you accountable for your actions..."*

Signed,

Senators Blumenthal and Murray

PUBLIC ATTACKS ON PRESS AND CONGRESS

February 13: Collins uses one of his first public addresses to veterans, from his VA headquarters office, to attack the media and claim reports of cuts and firings were untrue and only publicized because the media's "got to write something."

March 11: Collins debases himself by overtaking an interview with veterans and military news journalist Patricia Kime to inaccurately castigate her reporting while avoiding key questions.

March 17: Collins continues to blame the media for his mistakes and calls critics "fake news."

March 27: In one of his only mainstream media appearances at the time, Collins refuses to answer a CNN journalist's questions.

June 18: Collins calls the media and Democrats "dangerous" for accurately reporting the removal of bylaw language from VA hospitals that ensured veterans receive equal access to their health care regardless of political party, marital status, and other factors.

June 20: Collins uses his official social media accounts—in front of the American and VA flags—to claim the media and Democrats "have no standards" despite accurate reporting on recent policy changes.

June 20: Collins hosts a virtual town hall for all VA employees and uses the opportunity to once again blame the media and claim their accurate reports are false instead of directly answering questions from VA employees.

July 8: Collins calls the press "fake news" and "theatrics" after he was forced to reverse his own goal of firing 83,000 employees following pressure from veterans, VSOs, Congress, and the American public and fact-based reports on the impacts of those cuts.

September 19: Collins berates ProPublica reporters and accuses them of stalking because they are contacting VA employees while they are off the clock to get their perspective on what is happening at the Department—all actions protected by the First Amendment.

September 29: Following an article outlining negative impacts of VA's hapless contract cancellations, Collins calls reporters at Express News liars and demands they retract their story without providing any evidence to contradict their claims.

GUTTING INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT

The VA OIG is an independent watchdog charged with safeguarding veterans and taxpayers by uncovering fraud, waste, and abuse within VA. For decades, its data-driven investigations have led to improved care and accountability for veterans and taxpayers.

In January 2025, Trump recklessly fired VA Inspector General Mike Missal, along with eighteen other non-partisan, independent Inspectors General with no notice and no justification.

As Inspector General, Missal worked with multiple Administrations to identify over \$40 billion in waste, fraud, and abuse at VA since 2016. Firing Missal and eliminating his independent oversight was not only a betrayal of trust but a violation of law. Veterans deserve VA to be held accountable to meet the highest standards of efficiency and integrity in health care, benefits, and all the services it provides. The OIG has been central to fulfilling this mission.

Additionally, after barely one week on the job as Secretary, Collins was tapped by Trump to be the interim head of the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) and the Office of Special Counsel (OSC). OGE and OSC are independent agencies that play key roles in promoting integrity and accountability across the executive branch, including at VA.

OGE sets ethics rules and oversees compliance with financial requirements to ensure transparency among senior officials. OSC protects federal employees from prohibited personnel practices such as whistleblower retaliation. One third of OSC cases come from VA employees. Together, these agencies serve as vital safeguards for VA employees— supporting their rights, protecting them from retaliation, and ensuring ethical standards are upheld across the Department.

Nevertheless, Trump inexplicably decided Collins was the first and right choice for the job. While calling into question the respect and value of the Office of VA Secretary, the inappropriate conflict of interest created by Collins leading OGE and OSC also undermined the work of these two critical agencies. Dismantling OSC's independence effectively closed an important avenue of redress for VA employees, as they could no longer trust the agency to fairly and independently review their claims.

FINAL THOUGHTS: DIRECTLY FROM VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

“I am married to a USMC veteran. My husband proudly served this country including multiple tours in Iraq. The current actions being taken on federal employees and VA Health Care is taking a huge hit to my husband’s mental health and stability. He continues to be proud of the country he served but does not feel USA is still that country, he is heartbroken to think of a situation in which VA is not here to provide care to Veterans, and he is personally worried about the impact of massive terminations (most unjust) on our family. In the time I have known him, I have never worried about self harm but at this point, I do. We promised these men & women high quality care for the service they provided - we owe it to them and we should be ashamed for even considering ANYTHING that would break that promise.”—Veteran spouse, Arizona

“I am a veteran who served two decades in the USAF. I have used the VA for home purchase documents, educational benefits and I have rated service connected disabilities. For the the VA to function with efficacy it must have the personnel in place to meet the needs of the veteran...It is the solemn duty to facilitate and administer the earned benefits which help the veteran in the next chapters of life and, when the time comes, death. Losing personnel will have a negative impact on the ability to accomplish the mission and that is a betrayal of a duty and promise made to veterans made by the leadership of the country.

[VA] is the lifeline to next stage of life with educational benefits, the health care provider who understands the veteran experience, the administering of documentation that helps with a first time home purchase and the only place to turn with a service connected disability where people care enough to provide help.” —Veteran, North Carolina

“My father is a veteran, my brother is a veteran. My pappa was a veteran, he's gone now. Listen, you're not to let a billionaire cut VA benefits. These men and women have spent their lives serving America and in comes the billionaire to tell them ‘they don't need jobs’—they [do] need jobs, they need food, they need to pay their mortgage, they need to take care of their children.” —Veteran family member

“I am 100% total & permanent disabled Vietnam veteran who gets all of my health & medical care through the Cincinnati VA Medical Center. I am happy with my VA healthcare but the VA is already short staffed. With the recent announcement of 1,000 layoffs, potentially more layoffs & hiring freeze, I fear my healthcare at the VA will suffer greatly.” —Veteran, Ohio

“I am service connected for PTSD and Anxiety. The weekend and evening emails have severely exacerbated my conditions. I have to keep pushing through and not take leave because of already limited staff. Of the employees I have, I have almost a 50% call out rate daily due to stress-induced illness. I spent roughly 2/3 of my work days calming my staff and responding to DOGE taskers to agency heads instead of doing the job I was hired to do. Then I am working nights and working weekends doing my work.” —Veteran and VBA employee

“It’s becoming increasingly difficult to get care. The local VA clinics are not staffed with sufficient staff to address our needs...Appointments are often canceled or rebooked with little to no notice. Appointments are scheduled several weeks in advance and next appointment can take another 4-7 weeks. Staff are kind and attempt to accommodate. Medical staff rush through appointments to get to next veteran. This is worse in community care, it’s not better. Please continue to support the VA and stop cutting staff! This will affect patient care and kill veterans.” —Veteran, Maryland

“I use the VA for all of my health care needs. I live in a huge Navy town with lots of vets. The VA system [here] is already stressed due to lack of facilities and health care professionals. The closest VA hospital is a little more than 2 hours away. [My city] desperately needs more investment in the VA because they can’t care for the population without a proper hospital staffed with professionals. Wait time for appointments is normally a 3+ month wait. Everything takes a long time and the people are great. [My city] simply cannot afford ANY kind of cuts to the VA health system here. Too many people depend on it here.” —Veteran, Florida

“I’m a service connected disabled veteran who uses the VA for my medical care. Prior to the massive illegal firings and harassment by the current administration, I was happy with the care I received from the VA. I have used both VA services as well as been referred out to community care services. I dislike community care services as it is usually a lot more difficult to get in and be seen than through the VA. The times that I did go to community care, my providers ended up quitting practice with only a week of notice which resulted in me going back to the VA for the care originally referred out for. My physical and mental health has been deteriorating due to the stress from the current administrations fire first, ask questions later approach. For the love of all things holy, please fight for the VA to retain employees and contracts allowing them to continue the normal level of care I’ve come to expect.” —Veteran, Oklahoma

“I am concerned about how the cuts to the VA workforce will impact the VA hospital where I live. The staff at my local VA hospital is exemplary and they do not deserve this massive reduction in force. It is clear that Secretary Collins was nominated by POTUS to dismantle the VA and I am outraged. This is a betrayal of our nation’s veterans and this must be stopped. —Veteran, Washington

“I am a female, United States Navy Veteran concerned with the indiscriminate cuts the current administration is yielding against our VA system.

In 1993 I entered a contractual agreement with the American people: I will, at whatever cost, protect our constitutional rights against all enemies foreign and domestic and in return the American citizens will provide any needed care, educational benefits and home loan assistance I may require.

Both parties understood the VA would uphold the American people’s contractual responsibility for my lifetime no matter the cost nor administration. The unsubstantiated personnel cuts in the VA puts the VA, thereby the American people, in danger of breach of contract.

How will the DOD recruit when potential enlistees realize the system designed to support Veterans actually neglects them? What will be the state of our defense arm be when the American youth realize the promises are empty or vulnerable to administrative whims?

The Veterans Administration requires adequate personnel to assist the 18.1 million Veterans who have proudly and honorably served this country. Failure for the US government to fulfill the American people’s promise to our Veterans will be shameful and detrimental. The VA needs to fight as diligently as my 17 year-old self was willing to in order to protect the US Veterans.” —Veteran, North Carolina

“I am a disabled Vietnam veteran and I use the VA health care system for all of my needs. The level of care that I receive is exceptional and I am very grateful to have it. I have a good friend that works at the VA and he recently told me that the cuts have seriously affected the morale of the staff and are beginning to affect the level of care. I am very disturbed and angry with the Trump administrations cuts to VA staffing and budget. I believe that we have earned the quality care that we currently receive. I trust that you and your colleagues will continue to fight for veterans rights and oppose these cuts.” —Veteran, Connecticut

“Although my local [clinic] is doing an amazing job with limited assets, staffing issues are emerging. Staff nurses are having to cover multiple clinics in order to provide care. I recently had to speak with a clinic nurse who was ‘covering’ for 2 other nurses. She told me that lack of staffing is beginning to erode care... especially in specialty clinics like hematology and emergency care.” —Veteran, Oregon

“My husband is a 100% permanent/total disabled Marine Corps veteran, who gets all of his care at the VA hospital in Albany, NY, and I am his caregiver. I coordinate all of his medical care, manage his medications, and take him to his appointments . Before I go into the reason for me contacting you, I want to say that all of his providers there are wonderful and he has received excellent care. Since February of this year, we have seen a rapid decline in medical staff that directly affects the care provided to veterans, and a decline in support staff. Many of these changes have directly affected my husband, and two recent experiences have me furious and I feel this warrants your attention.

About a month ago, I received a call from the dental clinic informing me that the only oral surgeon at Stratton abruptly ‘retired’, and that all pending appointments have been canceled and will be referred out to community care. My husband has pending work to be done for dental implants since he has missing teeth. I said “ok.” He's had other dental work done in the community before and the provider was nearby. The assistant told me we would be contacted by a community care scheduler when they got to his referral.

Today that call came from someone at Stratton to get him set up with a provider in the community for his needed dental work with an oral surgeon. She told me that the nearest authorized oral surgeon in-network was 90 miles away in Westfield, MA. 90 miles. How can this administration continue to remove medical staff from the VA hospitals and NOT simultaneously add more in-network community care providers to for veteran's healthcare? How is this in the best interest of the veteran?

The 2nd incident involves an ER visit at Stratton in August 2025. This was due to an infection in a post-surgical site that spread to his heel bone as evidenced on the MRI that was done. The ER medical team consulted with the head of ortho at Stratton, and determined that his surgical site would need to be re-opened, remove the stitches that were left in there, clean out infected tissue, and take a biopsy of the bone to see what kind of bacteria was present. (The original surgery was last year, and was done through community care.) Stratton did not have the staff anymore to perform that procedure, so he was transferred to Albany medical center across the street.

We sat in the Albany medical center ER - in a hallway gurney - for almost 15 HOURS before they found a bed upstairs for him. He was cleared and prepped for surgery, and the morning of the surgery (they day after he was placed in the room) he was told the surgery wouldn't be happening at that time, because the VA had set him up with a bone and joint specialist in Albany. So they discharged him. The specialist will now be performing the surgery in late September.

Cont. from page 49

“...That ER experience is another reason why cutting staff and services at VA hospitals is not in the best interest of the veteran. Medical care in the community is already strained, and they are adding even more strain by forcing veterans to the community for care. How can they push more medical services for veterans to the community without increasing the amount of providers in the community that will accept VA patients? Every provider at our VA hospital has been wonderful, and they treat every veteran with the dignity and care they deserve. Out in the community - most of the time you're just another number. It is incredibly upsetting to see our veterans that have sacrificed so much be treated this way by an administration that is determined to make access to quality care this difficult.”
—Veteran spouse, New York

“The type of care I receive, in my experience, has been excellent. While I appreciate the additional support I receive from the VA, the mental healthcare has been vital in helping me adapt to life post military and come to terms with life as it should be. I am forever thankful for what the VA means for my veteran family - for many, this is their only healthcare. Any adverse impact to the VA will be detrimental to the trust between the service member and the government. We volunteered to do hard things and we expect that the government will take care of us in exchange. I am particularly concerned about the treatment, real or perceived, of my LGBTQI family members. They, like I, deserve to be treated with the dignity and respect they have earned.” —Veteran, West Virginia

“I live in Montana and am experiencing a severe mental health crisis. Upon my initial contact to the VA about this things moved quickly and I was contacted quickly by a nurse. After several phone calls (the nurse was incredible) I was informed the wait time for a psychiatrist was 6 months. I was referred for a medication management pharmacist or nurse practitioner that could prescribe medication and manage any changes and that appointment is March 10, 2026. I have opted to take on the expense and secured my own psychiatrist but am very angry in having to do this.

Wait times are horrible for any kind of care right now. I was told it would take 4-6 weeks to have an authorization issued to obtain a yearly eye exam. My husband is waiting 3 months for a routine yearly CPAP appointment. Our local VA facility in Hamilton, Montana has a 3 month wait time for an appointment.

In addition the clinic in Hamilton is staffed with the equivalent of one full time doctor and 2 physicians share that allotment. This is a new facility thanks to John Tester and we no longer have to have blood drawn in a janitors closet converted to accommodate blood draws but what good is a building if it does not have staff to serve the veterans of this community.

Cont. from page 50

“...We were promised a mental health counselor in this new building when it opened in Spring 2025 and there is still no counselor. All counselors are located in Missoula, Montana 45 minutes away with very few Care in the Community options.

I am angry beyond words and for someone dealing with a mental health crisis that is not healthy.”—Veteran, Montana

“My husband and I are both Vietnam-era veterans, although he served in the Philippines and I served with NATO in Germany. The heartless attack by the current administration on our government services, especially the Department of Veteran's Affairs, is frightening in that we both receive our medical health benefits through the VA and have been blessed with the expert care we have received for over 10 years.

My father served in the Navy for 25 years, during WWII and Korea - he received a hero's welcome home. My brother served in the marines during Vietnam - he was spit on and cursed when he returned home. I now feel that our government is spitting on us in the same way. This ongoing attack by DOGE is reminiscent of those days when veterans were held in contempt.

Please don't punish us for having served our country.”—Veteran, Idaho