

2014 that listed more than 1,000 VA employees who should be removed from the VA for violations: “people who violated our values . . . its integrity, its advocacy, its respect, its excellence.” He also described, with multiple news outlets, that he would be taking “aggressive, expeditious, disciplinary action” to address the wrongdoers who violated VA values.

It was made abundantly clear that Congress needed to give him the necessary tools to discipline VA employees because he was “hamstrung” by the current process with the Merit Systems Protection Board and the appeals process. Congress did that. While we may not remember the provisions of the Choice Act—because it was known for the efforts to provide veterans across the country who live long distances from a VA facility or who can’t get the services they need within 30 days from the VA, it gave them hometown local options. That is what this Choice Act was known for, but the Choice Act also included important accountability provisions. The Secretary has those provisions now with the passage of the Choice Act that occurred in August of 2014. Those authorities seemingly are the ones the Secretary has been reluctant to use. We have complained about the reluctance at the VA to use those authorities and to discipline members of the leadership, employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs, but now we just learned, as my colleagues earlier indicated, that the leadership of the VA refuses to use the authorities at all. So it is not just a reluctance. It is now an admission that we are not going to use them.

As disappointed as I am, as a Member of Congress—as my colleagues are who spoke earlier in this VA decision, our frustration has to be nothing—nothing—compared to what our Nation’s veterans experience in their dissatisfaction with a VA that declines to hold accountable those who work in leadership positions. We ought to be honoring their service. What Department would we expect to care for, to treat, to love and show compassion for more than our Department of Veterans Affairs? Whom would we expect to receive that kind of noble treatment? It would be those who serve us in our military. Americans—both veterans and nonveterans—are waiting for the VA to step up and do what is right by removing those who have no place within the VA system.

I also would say, as I talk to employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs—those who actually work in the hospitals, provide the benefits, man the computers—they are dissatisfied too. They want to see change at the VA. So many employees are looking for leadership at the VA that holds accountable those in leadership who have failed to bring about the necessary change, and to have that necessary change takes discipline of those who are wrongdoers.

I want to make certain people understand this is not an attack on those

who work at the VA. They, too, want a VA system they can be proud to work for. I acknowledge and pay my respect and regard to the many, many, many employees of the Department who work every day to make certain that good things happen and that care is provided for those who served our Nation.

It seems to me, it is unfortunate the VA blames everybody but themselves for the problems at the VA. In fact, earlier this year, a couple months ago, April of 2016, the Secretary indicated that the fault—the inability to fix these problems—lies with Congress for not giving the VA enough money. He said budgetary failure led to the crisis. We have worked hard to make certain—in fact, I have indicated that if you can show a demonstrated need for more money at the Department of Veterans Affairs to take care of those who served our country, I am one who will vote for that. No one asked those who served our country about what it was going to cost to go to war. We ought not be unwilling to pay the price for those who did go to war on our behalf.

I would say the VA’s problems are not budgetary. President Obama himself stated that the VA is the most funded agency across the Federal Government, with an increase of more than 80 percent in resources since 2009. I remember reading this quote. The President said that the most resourced agency in his administration, in his time in office, was the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The blame for the VA’s inadequacies have nothing to do with the demand or insufficient funds but the management and lack of leadership. In fact, according to the VA’s own data, veterans are waiting 50 percent longer to receive health care services than they were in 2014 when we realized the crisis existed. At the height of the crisis, we had a waiting list. That waiting list is now 50 percent longer than it was at that time. It has become clear that the VA seemingly is more concerned with protecting those who work there within their ranks and the leadership than protecting the veteran who has sacrificed so much for our Nation. The VA was created to serve veterans, not to serve the VA.

Today my colleagues from the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs were here raising their desire to give the Secretary even more authority and expressing their frustration, which I share, with the lack of urgency to hold bad actors accountable. In that process of the conversation that took place earlier, they were advocating for legislation that is pending before the Senate called the Veterans First Act that was passed by our Committee on Veterans’ Affairs weeks ago, and they believe that legislation will give the Secretary even additional authorities. That is true.

The Senator from Connecticut, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, the ranking member of the committee, and I worked to include

in the Veterans First Act a number of accountability provisions to try to fix the VA at the root of its problem at the top.

So while I agree with the desire to see the Veterans First Act passed into law and while I agree that it will give the Secretary and others at the Department of Veterans Affairs more authority to hold accountable bad actors at the VA, I think what we really need to make certain happens is that the Secretary and the leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs use the authority they already had provided them by Congress in August of 2014 to hold people accountable.

If actions this week tell us anything, we must push the VA to use the authorities they already have, and we would have cause, reason to be skeptical that even giving them greater authorities would result in a better outcome.

Our Nation’s veterans deserve better, and they deserve a VA in which those who do wrong pay a consequence for that bad behavior.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO DORA MARGARET SAMUDIO

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, today I would like to pay tribute to a great American public servant and Texan, Ms. Dora Margaret Samudio. Ms. Samudio is retiring after 50 years of dedicated Federal service.

Dora was born on October 1, 1945. After she graduated from Sam Houston High School in 1963, Dora began her distinguished Federal career with the Texas State Department of Public Welfare. Shortly thereafter, she became a clerk typist at the U.S. Army Medical Field Service School in Fort Sam Houston, TX.

In September 1969, in the midst of the Vietnam war, Dora left her native Texas to pursue a career in Washington, DC. For the next year, she worked for the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command in the Surgeon General’s office until she moved to the War Plans Division at the Pentagon in 1970. At the Pentagon,

Dora served as a stenographer with the Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations. She then transferred to the litigation division, where she worked for the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General. Dora was responsible for gathering Army witnesses from all over the world to testify in Federal court and kept records of collateral Army aircraft accidents in Vietnam. In 1972, she began working for the U.S. Army Court of Military Review in Falls Church, VA.

Dora briefly left Federal service to work at Williams, Connall & Califano in Washington, DC, and at Robinson, Robinson & Cole in Hartford, CT.

In the grand tradition of transplant Texans, Dora returned to the Lone Star State in 1978, where she has spent the remainder of her Federal service. In San Antonio, Dora worked at the U.S. Attorney's office until 1980, when she began working for the Honorable William S. Sessions, who was Chief Judge of the Western District of Texas. Dora served a vital role in his office until he was appointed as Director of the FBI in 1987. She then served as a secretary to an attorney and three Customs agents with the Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section of the Department of Justice, DOJ, Criminal Division.

In July 1988, Ms. Samudio began her nearly 30 years of work as a judicial assistant to the Honorable John W. Primomo, U.S. magistrate judge. Judge Primomo holds Dora with highest regards and had the following to say about her:

I have known Dora for more than 30 years since she was the Judicial Assistant for Chief Judge William S. Sessions of the Western District of Texas. After his appointment as Director of the F.B.I. and my appointment as United States Magistrate Judge in 1988, it was my fortune that Dora applied to be my judicial assistant. I was surprised that she would be willing to 'humble' herself to work for a magistrate judge after serving the chief judge of the district. She is exceptional in all respects. I have always told Dora she is over-qualified to be my judicial assistant, yet she has stayed. She is totally dedicated and extremely loyal. We have shared many of our personal ups and downs over the years. A part of me will be missing when Dora retires at the end of the month. It has been a privilege and an honor to work with her for the past 28 years.

Throughout her career, she has served with integrity and character. Her legacy will continue to benefit those who know her, and I join with her family, friends, and coworkers in telling that her experience and dedication will be missed.

I offer my thanks and appreciation to Dora Samudio for 50 years of steadfast service to our Nation and send my best wishes for the years ahead.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

RECOGNIZING BALDOR ELECTRIC COMPANY

• Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, today I wish to honor the Baldor Electric

Company of Fort Smith, AR, for officially completing 15 million accident-free work hours.

Baldor moved its production of industrial electric motors to Fort Smith in 1956 and, in 1961, relocated its corporate headquarters there as well. The company has employed thousands of Arkansans for nearly 60 years.

This company produces products that are part of every industry in America. Its equipment powers everything from drills on oil rigs and conveyer belts in mining operations, to air conditioning systems in hospitals and thrusters on Navy and Coast Guard ships.

The Arkansas Department of Labor, the Arkansas Insurance Department, and the Arkansas Workers' Compensation Commission recently presented Baldor Electric Company with a "Fifteen Million Man Hour Award" for its extraordinary commitment to workplace safety, making it the first company in Arkansas to receive this designation. This means that between August of 2010 and May of 2016, Baldor successfully prevented a work-related illness or injury for 1,250 employees.

This brings me tremendous pleasure as I understand full well that the importance of workplace safety cannot be overstated. Families across the State of Arkansas, as well as the country, depend on and expect the safe return of their loved ones each day—and with 15 million accident-free hours, Baldor Electric Company has truly set the standard in ensuring just that. Much of Baldor's success has stemmed from its use of a safety program that utilizes a safety committee that includes both employees and managers.

I offer my gratitude to Baldor Electric Company for ensuring the safety of its employees for over 15 million hours of work. I congratulate the company for breaking Arkansas' safety record. I look forward to hearing about the company's future success.●

TRIBUTE TO GRACIE SCHRAM

• Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I wish to recognize an inspirational artist, entrepreneur, and philanthropist from my State, Gracie Schram, who has been awarded the 2016 Nation Federation of Independent Business Owners Young Entrepreneur Award.

Miss Schram, of Leawood, KS, is the founder and owner of Gracie Schram Music, an entertainment company that provides live performance, speaking engagements, original music, recordings, and merchandise.

At the young age of 10, she was introduced to the reality of underprivileged children in Haiti and Africa. Inspired to do good, she was determined to improve the living conditions of so many she hadn't even met.

She went on to write and produce several albums, the proceeds of which led to the building of two fish ponds in Africa and an orphanage in Haiti. This is an extraordinary accomplishment. When asked why she has chosen to help

those in need, her response was, "I was just a kid who wasn't willing to wait for somebody else to change the world."

I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing Miss Schram on her outstanding achievements. We wish her nothing but the best for her future entrepreneurial and educational endeavors.●

PEASE GREETERS' 1,000TH FLIGHT

• Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, as we approach the Fourth of July, I want to salute the Pease Greeters for their very special brand of patriotism—a patriotism of deeds, not words. Since 2005, they have gathered at Pease International Airport in Portsmouth, NH, to give a warm send-off or welcome home to servicemembers in transit to or from conflict zones in the Middle East and elsewhere. This past Sunday, the Greeters reached a remarkable milestone by gathering at Pease to meet their 1,000th flight. The welcoming ceremony concluded with words that have become the group's signature greeting: "We the old warriors salute you the young warriors."

For tens of thousands of uniformed servicemembers, many of them en route to or from combat zones in Iraq or Afghanistan, Pease airport is the last place they set foot on U.S. soil when they depart and the first place they set foot when they return. Prior to 2005, troops encountered a mostly empty and unwelcoming airport terminal. That year, airport officials contacted Charles Cove, a Vietnam war veteran and asked if he would gather a group of Granite Staters to greet a unit of 135 servicemembers heading to combat duty in Iraq. Mr. Cove gathered some fellow veterans and others, and they met the Iraq-bound soldiers with coffee, doughnuts, and warm words of support and appreciation.

Following that impromptu event, Mr. Cove and co-founder Edmund Johnson, a decorated Marine veteran of the Korean war, joined with fellow veterans and other Seacoast residents to form the Pease Greeters. Many in the group are old enough to remember that servicemembers returning from the Vietnam war were greeted with indifference or even hostility. Mr. Cove, who earned two Purple Hearts in Vietnam, said he made a promise to himself and his country that he would not allow this to happen to future servicemembers and veterans.

Since 2005, the Pease Greeters have not missed a single flight, ensuring that every departing and returning servicemember is given a hero's greeting and warm words of appreciation. Several thousand volunteers, ranging in age from retired veterans to young children, have joined in this mission. They have transformed the airport terminal at Pease into a "Heroes' Walk," with framed group photos of all the military units that have passed through the airport since 2005.