

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,