



September 13, 2016

Dear Representative:

On behalf the Senior Executives Association (SEA) and its members, who are career federal executives in the Senior Executive Service (SES), and those in Senior Level (SL), Scientific and Professional (ST), and equivalent positions, including those serving at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), I write to express strong concerns about the “accountability” provisions in this legislation and to urge Members to **oppose H.R. 5620**.

SEA understands the need for accountability at the VA, and across the government, and absolutely supports holding individuals accountable for wrong-doing if it is proven to have occurred following an impartial investigation that provides genuine due process. Nonetheless, SEA has been troubled by the ongoing attacks against SES leaders at the VA, and the deleterious effects it has and will continue to have on the ability of the agency to attract and retain the leadership it needs to best serve veterans in the future.

As Members are surely aware, the VA has struggled for years to fill executive leadership positions within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and other critical VA positions. Indeed, a [survey](#) of VA senior executives conducted by SEA this spring found an agency already struggling to retain its career senior executive leaders, with nearly three in four respondents saying that unfair media and congressional scrutiny, lack of agency leadership support, and diminished or complete inability to be considered for performance-based awards were causing them to consider leaving the VA. Similarly, those factors are making it incredibly difficult for the VA to attract and retain the best career senior leaders possible, with 97% of respondents saying they were concerned about the ability of the agency to fill those crucial roles.

Congress must recognize its responsibility for creating this toxic environment. Many Members often argue that government should run more like a business. If that were the case, Congress would be the government’s Board of Directors, and a responsible Board of Directors would be horrified by these figures. It would recognize a different tactic was needed. Many in Congress appear to believe the VA can fire its way to excellence. It’s not that simple, and a sticks-only workforce management strategy is not one that any successful business would advocate for.

SEA and its members welcome a dialogue about ways to truly reform and improve the VA workforce, and that respects employees and constitutionally guaranteed due process rights. Unfortunately, this legislation suggests more of an interest in the *appearance* of reforming the VA workforce than a *real commitment* to undertaking the hard work of understanding what the real problems are, working with stakeholders to craft a solution, and holding parties responsible to see improvements through to a conclusion.

Thank you for considering SEA’s views. If you have any questions or comments regarding this request, please contact SEA’s Legislative & Media Coordinator Nikki Cannon at 202-463-8400; [ncannon@shawbransford.com](mailto:ncannon@shawbransford.com).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Briefel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JASON BRIEFEL  
Interim President