

Trump signs law to make VA more accountable for vets' care

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and JONATHAN LEMIRE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed a bill into law Friday that will make it easier for the Department of Veterans Affairs to fire employees, part of a push to overhaul an agency that is struggling to serve millions of military vets.

"Our veterans have fulfilled their duty to our nation and now we must fulfill our duty to them," Trump said during a White House ceremony. "To every veteran who is here with us today, I just want to say two very simple words: Thank you."

Trump repeatedly promised during the election campaign to dismiss VA workers "who let our veterans down," and he cast Friday's bill signing as fulfillment of that promise.

"What happened was a national disgrace and yet some of the employees involved in these scandals remained on the payrolls," Trump said. "Outdated laws kept the government from holding those who failed our veterans accountable. Today we are finally changing those laws."

The measure was prompted by a 2014 scandal at the Phoenix VA medical center, where some veterans died as they waited months for care. The VA is the second-largest department in the U.S. government, with more than



President Donald Trump shakes hands with Michael Verardo, who lost his leg in Afghanistan serving as a Sergeant in the 82nd Airborne Division in 2010, during a bill signing event at the White House Friday.

350,000 employees, and it is charged with providing health care and other services to military veterans.

Federal employee unions opposed the measure. VA Secretary David Shulkin, an Obama administration hold-over, stood alongside Trump as the president jokingly suggested he'd have to invoke his reality TV catchphrase "You're fired" if the reforms were not implemented.

The legislation, which many veterans' groups supported, cleared the House last week by an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote of

368-55, replacing an earlier version that Democrats had criticized as overly unfair to employees. The Senate passed the bill by voice vote a week earlier.

Paul Rieckhoff, founder of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, applauded the move, saying, "In a nasty, partisan environment like we've never seen, veterans' issues can be a unique area for Washington to unite in actually getting things done for ordinary Americans."

The bill was a rare Trump initiative that received Democratic support. Montana Sen.

Jon Tester said the bill "will protect whistleblowers from the threat of retaliation."

The new law will lower the burden of proof to fire employees, allowing for dismissal even if most evidence is in a worker's favor.

The American Federation of Government Employees, the largest federal employee union, opposed the bill. But the Senate-passed measure was seen as more in balance with workers' rights than a version passed by the House in March, mostly along party lines.

5 GOP senators now oppose health bill — enough to sink it

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nevada Republican Dean Heller became the fifth GOP senator to declare his opposition to the party's banner legislation to scuttle much of Barack Obama's health care overhaul on Friday, more than enough to sink the measure and deliver a stinging rebuke to President Donald Trump unless some of them can be brought aboard.

Echoing the other four, Heller said he opposes the measure "in this form" but does not rule out backing a version that is changed to his liking. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has said he's willing to alter the measure to attract support, and next week promises plenty of back-room bargaining as he tries pushing a final package through his chamber.

Nonetheless, Heller's announcement underscores the scant margin of error Republican leaders must deal with. Facing unanimous Democratic opposition, McConnell can afford to lose just two of the 52 GOP senators and still prevail.

The other four who have opposed it are Sens. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Mike Lee of Utah, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Ted Cruz of Texas.

Besides the five who've announced outright opposition, several other GOP senators — conservatives and moderates — have declined to commit to the new overhaul. The measure resembles legislation the House approved last month that the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said would mean 23 million additional uninsured people within a decade and that recent polling shows is viewed favorably by only around 1 in 4 Americans.

Heller, facing a competitive re-election battle next year, said he was opposing the legislation because of



Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., during a press conference where he announced he will vote no on the proposed GOP health care bill at the Grant Sawyer State Office Building on Friday.

the cuts it would make in Medicaid. The federal-state program provides health care to the poor, disabled and many nursing home patients.

The Senate bill would also erase the tax penalties Obama's 2010 law imposes on people who don't purchase insurance. It would allow insurers to cover fewer benefits and repeal tax boosts on wealthier people that help finance the statute's expanded coverage.

The Senate legislation would phase out extra federal money Nevada and 30 other states receive for expanding Medicaid to additional low earners. It would also slap annual spending caps on the overall Medicaid program, which since its inception in 1965 has provided states with unlimited money to cover eligible costs.

"I cannot support a piece of legislation that takes insurance away from tens of millions of Americans and tens of thousands of Nevadans," Heller said.

Trump has spoken favorably about both the House-passed bill and the Senate version unveiled this week, though he declared several times as he ramped up his campaign for the presidency that he would not cut Medicaid.

Trump labors to make Mueller-Comey tie a talking point

WASHINGTON (AP) — Robert Mueller, the somber-faced and demanding FBI director who led the bureau through the Sept. 11 attacks, and James Comey, his more approachable and outwardly affable successor, may be poles apart stylistically but both command a wealth of respect in the law enforcement and legal community.

That hasn't stopped President Donald Trump and his associates from repeatedly trying to draw unflattering attention to their relationship, insinuating a personal bond they suggest could disqualify Mueller from credibly serving as special counsel in charge of the Russia investigation. Most recently, in an interview that aired Friday on "Fox & Friends," Trump claimed Mueller was "very, very good friends with Comey, which is bothersome."



In this Sept. 4, 2013, file photo, then-incoming FBI Director James Comey talks with outgoing FBI Director Robert Mueller before Comey was officially sworn in at the Justice Department in Washington.

The emphasis on their ties, besides being aimed at undermining Mueller's credibility and the legitimacy of his investigation, could also be an attempt by Trump to make the case for an eventual Mueller dismissal on conflict

of interest grounds. But the truth is more complicated and not squarely on the president's side.

Mueller and Comey, both known for their integrity and self-assuredness, served closely alongside each other

in the Bush administration Justice Department. They played pivotal roles in a 2004 White House confrontation and have spoken warmly of each other over the years, with Comey describing Mueller as "one of the finest people I've ever met." But they're not known to be especially close friends, and legal experts say whatever connection they do have doesn't come close to meriting Mueller's removal.

"Jim has never been to Bob's house. Bob has never been to Jim's house," said David Kelley, who succeeded Comey as U.S. attorney in Manhattan and has known him and Mueller for years. "They've had lunch together once and dinner together twice, once with their spouses and again after Jim became the FBI director so that Bob could give him the rundown of what to look for."

UMATILLA COUNTY FAIR

AUGUST 8-12, 2017

<p>Tues. Aug. 8 • 9pm LOCASH</p>	<p>Wed. Aug. 9 • 9pm Tracy Lawrence</p>	<p>Thur. Aug. 10 • 9pm The Marshall Tucker Band</p>	
<p>Fri. Aug. 11 Latino Night TBA</p>	<p>Sat. Aug. 12 • 9pm Great White</p>		

Reserved Tickets ON SALE NOW! ONLY \$12

(does not include admission)

PREMIUM SEATING \$20
(does not include fair admission)

CARNIVAL WRISTBANDS \$25

(thru August 7) \$30 after fair starts

Available at: Fair Office • Fiesta Foods • Ranch & Home
Hermiston Chamber • Pendleton Chamber
Columbia Bank • Banner Bank • Columbia Harvest Foods

SAVE \$5 when you purchase early!

TITLE SPONSOR

WILD HORSE RESORT & CASINO

Call 541.567.6121 or stop by the Fair office
1705 E. Airport Rd, Hermiston
www.umatillacounty.net/fair

Order your concert tickets and admission tickets online.

Meet us at the **BARLEY BARN** for music & dancing!

HURRY - RETC & PROPERTY TAX SET TO EXPIRE 12/31!

ENROLLING NOW FOR FALL 2017

Sunthurst Energy, LLC

Turning Sunlight to Savings

Your **Trusted Consultant & EPC PARTNER**

(310) 975-4732
sunthurstenergy.com

Trade Ally of EnergyTrust of Oregon

SOLARWORLD REAL VALUE AUTHORIZED INSTALLER

BBB ACCREDITED BUSINESS Rating: A

OR CCB 201975

Now Accepting Reservations

Cascade Valley

Assisted Living and Memory Care

Prime Apartments Available
In both Assisted Living & Memory Care

Private Pay SPECIAL
Move in by July 10 3rd month FREE!

Book Your Appointment Today!
Also Accepting OR Medicaid Residents

www.cascadevalleyassistedliving.com
(360) 869-3785

1010 NE THIRD AVE,
MILTON FREEWATER, OR

Like us on Facebook