



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

Eugene Hudson, Jr.  
National Secretary-Treasurer

J. David Cox, Sr.  
National President

Augusta Y. Thomas  
NVP for Women & Fair Practices

1/367414

March 15, 2017

RE: HR 1259

Dear Representative:

As H.R. 1259 is rushed to the floor tomorrow, I write on behalf of the 230,000 dedicated VA employees represented by the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE) to express our grave concerns that this bill will politicize the VA workforce and destroy the collective bargaining rights of every VA employee trying to save his job.

The little-known union-busting provisions in H.R. 1259 can be found in Section 3(a) ("section 7121 of such title shall not apply with respect to such a removal, demotion, or suspension") and in Section 9(a) (amending 38 USC 7461(b)(2) to eliminate collective bargaining rights for clinicians).

Without collective bargaining rights, Representative Roe leaves VA employees with only one avenue for appeal: a stripped down, rushed internal appeals process that forces supervisors to make their final decisions in five days, gives employees only seven days to file appeals with the Merit System Protection Board (MSPB) and bars MSPB judges from lowering penalties from removals to demotions or suspensions regardless of the facts of the case.

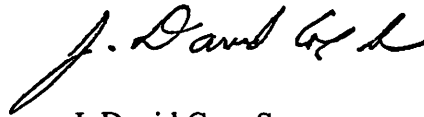
Congressman Roe has asserted that these changes are essential to get rid of "bad apples" in the VA but what the bill actually does is make it much easier to fire VA employees for good reasons and bad reasons. I urge you to consider the impact of this severe loss of rights in the context of the current political climate. The White House has made well known its dislike of federal employees who do not support its agenda. At a February 22<sup>nd</sup> press briefing, Sean Spicer stated that "we want to make sure that the people who staff a Trump administration are committed to a Trump agenda... no matter what position you have -- whether it's the lowest or the highest in the White House or in a department or agency". Similarly, when VA employees started expressing their opposition to the Trump agenda after hours, a White House spokesman stated that "[e]mployees of the Trump administration should support President Trump and his agenda to improve the lives of all Americans".



Veterans' best interests are served when VA employees are not afraid to speak up for them and when they are hired because of their skills, not their politics.

Therefore, AFGE urges you to oppose H.R. 1259. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. David Cox, Sr.", written in a cursive style.

J. David Cox, Sr.  
AFGE National President