

SAVE OUR VA!

TALKING POINTS

SUPPORTING THE RIGHTS OF VA WORKERS AND THEIR UNIONS

BACKGROUND

On May 2, President Trump's VA Secretary Robert Wilke submitted to AFGE's National VA Council a 331-page proposal that overhauls the existing contract and eliminates entirely or effectively 42 articles that help guarantee a fair workplace. The American Federation of Government Employees, AFGE, is the largest union of VA employees. The proposal effectively strips 250,000 VA employees of many of the rights and protections they've won through collective bargaining.

Wilke's scheme to gut worker protections advances the Trump administration's objective to privatize and outsource veterans' care and redirect billions of dollars from serving veterans at the VA to instead send veterans to the private-sector where they will receive substandard care.

This is not the Trump administration's first attempt to gut workers' rights for their own political gain. Many of Wilke's proposals are lookalike anti-labor policies President Trump tried to implement government-wide last year through three Executive Orders that didn't hold up in federal court. Since the court has blocked the administration's illegal orders from taking effect, Trump's political appointees are hijacking the collective bargaining process not only at the VA but other federal agencies, including Social Security and the Department of Education, in an attempt to implement many of the proposals.

HOW WILKE'S PROPOSAL HURTS VETERANS:

Wilkie's plot to cripple the union contract for the 260,000 AFGE-represented employees will make it harder for front-line workers to give veterans the care they deserve.

- » The Trump administration's scheme eliminates safeguards that ensure whistleblowers are protected from retaliation for standing up for veterans, that guarantee VA employees are adequately trained so veterans always receive the same high standard of care, and that protect workplace safety – language that provides veterans and VA workers alike with a safe and secure place to work and to receive care.
- » The plan also strips VA workers – about one-third of whom are veterans themselves – of their rights, it also threatens quality care for veterans, and paves the way for a scheme to outsource veterans' health care that no one wants.
- » More privatization and outsourcing veterans' health care is opposed by the vast majority of veterans and every major veterans' organization. Veterans deserve high-quality care, and VA workers need a fair labor agreement to continue to provide that care. Period.
- » Wilkie's proposal also fails to address the 49,000 still-vacant positions that the VA has failed to fill -the majority of which are doctors, nurses, and other health care positions. VA employees and their unions are the targets of flagrant union busting campaigns in part because they represent a powerful and collective voice for the workers and a foe to those seeking privatization.



HOW WILKE'S PROPOSAL HURTS VA WORKERS:

- » Eliminates whistleblower protections.
- » Bars employees from filing grievances against unjust disciplinary actions and other workplace violations.
- » Leaves more issues to the discretion of managers, allowing them to play favorites when making decisions about reassignments, shift scheduling, accommodations for employees with disabilities, and other issues.
- » Severely restricts the ability to telework and allows managers to cancel or change telework agreements for any reason with just 12 hours advance notice.
- » Prevents doctors, nurses and other health care professionals from having input into routine work matters like training, workplace safety, schedules and assignments – which will make it impossible for the VA to compete against other health care employers that consider the input of front-line workers and their representatives.
- » Wlkie's proposal deletes entirely or in part 42 articles in the existing contract, including provisions that:
 - Require employees to be trained on new equipment or clinical processes needed for their jobs;
 - Establish and provide for child care facilities and related services;
 - Provide for alternative work schedules;
 - Enhance career, promotional, and training opportunities;
 - Detail the rights and protections for part-time, temporary, and probationary employees;
 - Set rules for administering within-grade pay increases, employee leave, and official travel;
 - Encourage effective labor-management cooperation;
 - Provide for joint labor-management training.

VETERANS RELY ON VA WORKERS AND THEY ARE INTEGRAL TO QUALITY CARE. ALL ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY VALUABLE WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS FOR EMPLOYEES OF THE VHA HURTS VETERANS.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Visit www.afge.org/iServeVeterans for updated news and information.

