



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL ENGINEERS AFL-CIO & CLC

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April 12, 2017

Hon. Phil Roe, Chairman
Veterans Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
335 Cannon Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Tim Walz, Ranking Member
Veterans Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
333 Cannon Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Roe & Ranking Member Walz:

On behalf of the 90,000 members of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), I am writing regarding HR 1461, an ideologically fueled bill that will do nothing to improve care for Veterans. Instead this bill, sponsored by Rep. Jodey Arrington (R, TX-19), is solely intended to undercut the ability of unions at the Veterans Administration (VA) from having the ability to properly represent VA workers, including the more than 120,000 Veterans employed at the VA. IFPTE urges you both to oppose this legislation.

This misguided bill places significant restrictions on the ability of elected union representatives to use official time for representational purposes. In fact, the restrictions are so harsh and so broad, that they would essentially dissuade union representatives from using official time at all, which is the intended outcome of HR 1461. More specifically, the bill calls for the following with respect to official time:

- A 50% cap on every union official's use of official time;
- A 25% cap on official time if the union official is in direct patient care or their grade is a GS 13 or higher;
- No official time at all for doctors, dentists, podiatrists, optometrists and chiropractors;
- No official time for representational legislative advocacy efforts, including those undertaken to represent and protect whistleblowers.

It is important to point out that during debates over the past decade and even during recent Congressional hearings, the value of official time has been reconfirmed again and again, as members from both sides of the aisle as well as credible and experienced federal managers have reiterated the fact that peer-representation by elected employee representatives is an extremely cost-effective way for both management and the nation's board of directors (Congress) to hear direct and candid feedback from the rank and file workers they rely upon to keep the government functioning every day, and to protect the taxpayer against instances of management incompetence and corruption. For civil servants at the VA and all throughout the federal government to be able to do their jobs effectively and to report wrongdoing without fear of reprisal, they must have credible and effective representation, independent of management, that can interact at all levels of government to provide decision-makers with a more balanced and complete picture to allow for better and more informed overall governance. Unfortunately, this bill pulls the rug out from under rank and file workers from having these protections. Not only is it counterproductive, it is also fiscally irresponsible.

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The attack on official time is not the only problem with HR 1461, as the bill also eliminates efficient and effective processes used for resolving conflict and helping management make good decisions when it comes to providing the best care for our Veterans. Sadly, and in what can only be described as nothing more than a punitive measure aimed at eroding union membership, the bill also allows union members to drop their membership at any time, and it extends worker probationary periods from twelve months to eighteen months.

Simply stated, this bill has nothing in it that is aimed at improving the VA. Rather, it is a bill whose targets are the employees at the VA, and the unions that represent them.

IFPTE does not represent one worker at the VA. However, IFPTE does represent thousands of Veterans across the nation that not only depend on the VA for their care, but value the services and care they receive, as well as the workers who provide those services. Unfortunately, this bill seeks to silence these dedicated workers, and will hinder, not help them provide even better services to Veterans.

For these reasons IFPTE urges you to oppose HR 1461. If you have any questions, please contact IFPTE legislative director, Matt Biggs at (202) 239-4880.

Sincerely,



Gregory J. Junemann,
President