

**Statement of Rep. Randy Hultgren (IL-14)**  
**Before the Committee on Veterans Affairs**  
**United States House of Representatives**  
**May 16, 2018**

I would like to discuss today the necessity of return on investment (ROI) measures at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Instead of taking a reactive approach to VA scandal, Congress should engage in rigorous oversight relying on clear measurements to make sure that our veterans are given access to the health care, education, job training and other services they need and deserve.

To achieve this higher level of oversight, Congress needs trusted access to VA information about how agency appropriations have demonstrated measurable successes for veterans – to determine and assess ROI for the VA and the programs it administers at the local level. The VA already has a mechanism in place to track internal agency spending. Granting Congress access to either this tool, its output or both is a first step in ensuring we have the information we need to determine what’s working and what isn’t earlier rather than too late.

The Veterans Employment Services Office (VESO) is a great example of a VA program where ROI measurement could have helped the agency more accurately determine what’s best for the veterans it serves. Last year VESO was restructured to enhance efficiency in the ways the VA interacts with veteran customers. Namely, the VA intended to replace one-on-one, in-person career counseling with webinars and a larger social media presence to reach more veterans regardless of location.

In March 2017 I sent a letter to the VA acknowledging this change and offering insights from VA employees in my district who had begun to see the ramifications of this restructuring. In it, I wrote:

While I appreciate supplemental online resources to aid veterans through the job search process, I wonder, despite the larger number of veterans who may have access to these services, will they be better served by a smaller cadre of personnel? Veterans Employment Specialists in my district are honored to provide the services, and while they fear losing their jobs, they fear more that the veterans they serve will no longer be able to get personal help with the job search process, beyond one-size-fits-all webinars and resume templates online.

According to one such VA employee in Illinois, because of significant VESO staff reductions, “the ability to provide the needed hands-on assistance will not be there. I connected with 42 service members last week who will all be retiring soon. Of that group, 27 are asking for guidance on how to proceed and be successful with federal employment. So once my colleagues and I are gone, there will be no ‘live’ sources to receive feedback on resumes or on how to proceed.”

The best time to provide career navigation assistance is when a service member or veteran is ready, and every time he or she is ready. The VA needs to track the employment of the individuals seeking employment assistance in order to demonstrate to Congress the importance and success of VESO. This information-gathering exercise should yield more than just a searchable database. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Studies are focused on using data to make crucial Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement reforms that pay for patient outcomes instead of volume of services. The objective is not only a greater ROI in terms of dollars spent, but a more meaningful ROI when it comes to a patient’s experience, recovery and quality of life.

The same thinking should be applied to the VA. Webinars, social media and online resume templates may produce a better, albeit unmeasurable, ROI with respect to dollars spent and veterans reached. However, the resources and trajectory of VESO should be value-based, dictated by the outcomes of the veterans they serve and not the volume.

The story of VESO and the veterans its employees were serving shows that relying on ROI in congressional oversight of the VA is not just important for determining which agency programs are failing to recommend reform or elimination. ROI data could have saved this invaluable veteran resource, namely the staff of men and women dedicated to coming alongside veterans during their job search.

The mission of the VA is to serve and honor the men and women who are America's veterans. The best way for the VA to accomplish this is for the agency and Congress to know empirically how and to what extent the VA is helping veterans. It's time for Congress to bring value- and outcome-based ROI measures to the VA and the veterans it serves.