

Why Can't the VA Fire an Employee Caught Watching Porn?

If one was seeking to demonstrate the extent to which the operations of the federal government are defective, many would immediately point to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, where just a few years ago [a healthcare scandal](#) exposed mass bureaucratic dysfunction and corruption.

Americans [across the political spectrum](#) recognize a need for reform at the VA, but changing culture in large institutions is rarely easy. And the red tape makes it damn near impossible.

Take the VA. Last week, it sent out [a press release](#) stating that officials at an office in Houston caught an employee “watching pornography while with a patient.”

Typically an employer would promptly fire an employee caught watching pornography at work. Yet under current federal law, the VA cannot immediately fire a worker unless there is evidence the employee committed an actual crime. Instead, the worker was placed on administrative duty and will continue to collect salary and benefits for at least 30 days.

Speaking to Fox & Friends a month ago, Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin had promised to fire “people who don’t show up to work, do cocaine, and watch porn at work.” But in a segment that ran over the weekend, Shulkin admitted he currently lacks the legal authority to fire an employee for this egregious conduct.

The last two occupants of the White House ran successful campaigns centered on themes of “change” and “draining the swamp.” This demonstrates that the American people crave change—*any change*.

But things in Washington, D.C., remain pretty much the same. Why?

The answer might reside in the nature of people and bureaucracy. People and politicians are noisy but have short attention spans; bureaucracies, on the other hand, are silent and patient. They have a way of resisting change and [growing stronger](#) over time.

Balzac once quipped, “Bureaucracy is a giant mechanism operated by pygmies.”

If Donald Trump’s administration cannot get legal authority to terminate a federal employee caught watching porn in the presence of a patient, it will be pretty clear that it’s the pygmies who hold the cards.