

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 23, 2014

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald,

With nearly 90 days having passed since the date that the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act was signed into law, we write to you again regarding the implementation of this important piece of legislation. As we discussed in our meeting before you were confirmed as Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), it is vitally important that you are successful in changing the culture there so that the veteran, not the VA bureaucracy, comes first.

With that in mind, we are dismayed to learn that senior leaders of the VA are still not being held accountable for their grievous misconduct. Recent news reports have stated, in fact, that the VA is allowing senior employees to retire in lieu of being dismissed.¹ As you know, the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act specifically includes provisions that enable swift accountability for senior leaders. It, therefore, appears that the law, which the President signed on August 7 of this year, is being ignored.

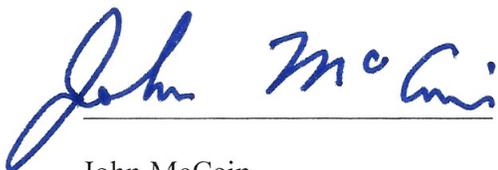
The clearest example of your failure to change the culture at the VA is the continued employment of Sharon Helman, the former director of the Phoenix VA Health Care system, who has been on paid administrative leave for nearly six months. Ms. Helman and other senior leaders collected huge bonuses for the timely delivery of health care to veterans, many of whom died while awaiting care after being placed on secret waiting lists. This is unacceptable.

In order to ensure that our veterans are being served and protected from VA senior leaders who have abused their positions, we request that you provide us with (1) a plan of action and associated milestones (and supporting deadlines) in connection with the VA's implementation of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, as we previously asked for; (2) clarification on whether the VA is in fact pursuing the removal of culpable personnel as has been recently reported and described above; and, if those reports are true, (3) a fulsome explanation of why this is being done and how such an approach engenders the accountability and change in culture at the VA you asserted yourself as committed to bringing to the VA.

¹ "Defining Dismissal Down," *The Wall Street Journal Review and Outlook*, October 20, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/defining-dismissal-down-1413758842>.

We also note that you have not responded to the letter we sent you last month regarding implementation of the Veterans Choice Card and the lack of awareness by VA officials in Phoenix of the provisions of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act. We are extremely disappointed in this lack of a timely response after the positive meeting we had and the assurances you gave us during your confirmation process. Rest assured that we will work with our colleagues to disallow the past dysfunctional culture and failures of leadership of the VA from continuing.

Sincerely,



John McCain
United States Senator



Jeff Flake
United States Senator