

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 22, 2014

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

Thank you for your willingness to lead the effort to fulfill our nation's commitment to America's heroes. We are confident in your leadership and are looking forward to working with you to restore Americans' trust in the Department of Veterans Affairs and to ensure veterans receive timely access to quality health care.

The seemingly unending revelations of long patient wait times, insufficient and uneven care, internal cover-ups, retribution against whistleblowers, tampering with records, employee misconduct, and other unacceptable behaviors at the VA fueled much-needed legislative action to bring accountability to the Department and to change a culture that did not always prioritize the care of veterans. In response, Congress passed legislation to overhaul VA's health care system by improving veterans' access to health care and bringing real accountability standards for Department employees. Specifically, the bill empowers the Secretary to more readily terminate employees for poor performance and misconduct by easing legal barriers that often made it challenging to remove underperforming employees in the past.

There has been no shortage of news stories and investigations exposing employees—particularly managers—at the VA who engaged in objectionable and outrageous behaviors that must never be tolerated for anyone in public service. Removing these employees is crucial to restoring confidence and accountability in the VA. Yet, more than a month since the President signed the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act into law on August 7, the Department has yet to use the new authority to fire senior officials and administrators for poor performance and unethical conduct.^[1] We are discouraged by the lack of termination of those who engage in willful and obvious unlawful behaviors.

Americans expect and deserve immediate action from the VA to demonstrate the culture and expectations at the Department is changing. It is essential inappropriate behaviors of VA employees will no longer be tolerated and those employees who have abused their positions, mistreated their coworkers, and disrespected veterans and their families are dealt with in a swift and timely manner as soon as possible.

On September 8, 2014, the VA issued a "Road to Veterans Day" strategy to improve the VA system Department-wide. "Rebuilding trust with veterans and stakeholders, improving service delivery focusing on better veteran outcomes, and setting the course for long-term excellence and reform" are

^[1] Mary Troyan, "Law making it easier to fire VA executives still unused," The Montgomery Advertiser, September 5, 2014; <http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/local/alabama/2014/09/05/law-making-easier-fire-va-executives-still-unused/15115237/>.

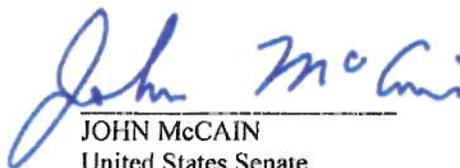
laudable and essential goals for the Department.¹²¹ Yet without holding unethical leaders accountable in the initial stages of VA reform, the above goals will be impossible to accomplish and veterans will continue to suffer at the hands of mismanagement and poor leadership.

This is a very crucial time for the Department as it restructures its health care system and implements changes to improve the quality of its medical care and services. This begins with removing those who were part of the cover-up and corruption that tarnished the VA's image and endangered the health and lives of our veterans and replacing them with individuals like you who have demonstrated the desire and commitment to serve those who served our Nation.

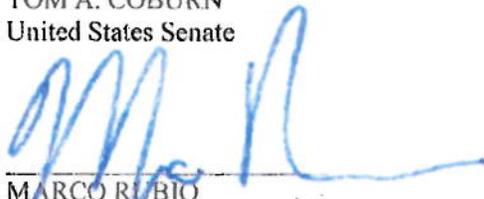
Sincerely,



TOM A. COBURN
United States Senate



JOHN McCAIN
United States Senate



MARCO RUBIO
United States Senate



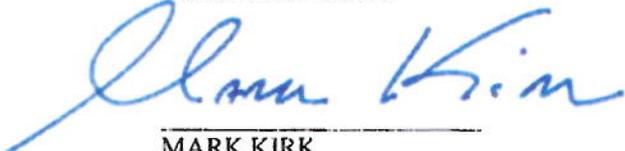
JAMES M. INHOFE
United States Senate



JERRY MORAN
United States Senate



TED CRUZ
United States Senate



MARK KIRK
United States Senate



JEFF FLAKE
United States Senate



JOHN CORNYN
United States Senate



TIM SCOTT
United States Senate

¹²¹ "Transcript: Secretary McDonald Press Conference: "Outlying the Road to Veterans Day," Department of Veterans Affairs, September 8, 2014; <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2622>.