



MEMORANDUM

FROM: Dan Caldwell, VP of Policy and Communications, Concerned Veterans for America

TO: Interested Parties

DATE: October 27, 2016

RE: The VA Scandals Outside of Phoenix

More than two years after the “secret wait list” scandal broke at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Phoenix, the situation at the Phoenix VA has gotten worse. Wait times are still too long and quality of care is still too low. Recent reports show that last year, [over 200 veterans there died waiting for care](#) – and that [whistleblowers are still facing retaliation](#). To make matters worse, the Phoenix VA [just appointed a controversial new director](#) with a history of mismanagement and negligence.

While the spotlight right now is – again – on Phoenix, it’s important to remember that these VA issues are actually systemic nationwide. According to the [New York Times](#) and a chorus of newspapers across the U.S., the VA is failing veterans from coast-to-coast. And major improvements won’t be happening anytime soon— not until legislation that truly addresses widespread mismanagement and neglect is passed into law.

According to dozens of editorial boards across the country, until DC politicians end the political finger pointing and commit to real reform, our veterans will continue to suffer.

Editorial Boards Across The Country Agree: The VA Remains Mired In Mismanagement, Controversy & Dysfunction

FLASHBACK: THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORTED THAT THE BROKEN VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM REMAINS IN DISREPAIR DESPITE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN INCREASED FUNDING

New York Times: “Did Obama’s Bill Fix Veterans’ Health Care? Still Waiting.” “Nowhere is the shortfall more clear than in the wait for appointments: Veterans are waiting longer to see doctors than they were two years ago, and more are languishing with extreme waiting times.” (Dave Philipps, “Did Obama’s Bill Fix Veterans’ Health Care? Still Waiting,” [The New York Times](#), 8/5/16)

New York Times: The VA Has Resisted Punishing Those Responsible For Manipulating Wait Times, Patient Data, And Other Unethical Behavior. “...Mr. Obama said: ‘If you engage in an unethical practice, if you cover up a serious problem, you should be fired. Period.’ But since then, just nine people have been fired for

manipulating wait times, according to the agency. And some of them ... could get their jobs back.” (Dave Philipps, “Did Obama’s Bill Fix Veterans’ Health Care? Still Waiting,” [The New York Times](#), 8/5/16)

EDITORIAL BOARDS HAVE SINCE DERIDED THE STATE OF VETERANS HEALTH CARE, CALLING ON THE AGENCY TO DEDICATE ITSELF TO “SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE” AND REAL REFORM

The Administration Continues To Gloss-Over A Broken And “Incompetent” VA Health Care System:

Chicago Tribune: “Money Won’t Fix What Ails The VA.” (Editorial Board, “Money Won’t Fix What Ails The VA. Here’s How To Revive It,” [Chicago Tribune](#), 9/2/16)

Chicago Tribune: President Obama Says Billions More Spent On The VA Is Making It Better. “Now, after major investigations and billions more spent, is the VA health system better? President Barack Obama says yes. ‘We’ve hired thousands more doctors, nurses, staff,’ he told a recent conference of the Disabled American Veterans. ‘When we really put our sweat and tears and put our shoulder to the wheel, we can make things better.’” (Editorial Board, “Money Won’t Fix What Ails The VA. Here’s How To Revive It,” [Chicago Tribune](#), 9/2/16)

Chicago Tribune: “But For Too Many Vets, Obama’s ‘Better’ Is No Good.” “But for too many vets, Obama’s ‘better’ is no good. Serious problems persist at the Veterans Health Administration, the VA’s medical wing. And they’ll continue to persist until Congress and the White House feverishly commit to three goals: Allow more veterans to seek medical care with private doctors ... Streamline and downsize the rest of the system to focus on specialized care for battle-related injuries that private docs can’t perform as well as VA staffers ... Fire workers who resist change or don’t perform.” (Editorial Board, “Money Won’t Fix What Ails The VA. Here’s How To Revive It,” [Chicago Tribune](#), 9/2/16)

USA Today: The Massive VA Bureaucracy “Has Been Slow To Embrace New Ideas.” “The agency’s mammoth bureaucracy, second only to the Pentagon, has been slow to embrace new ideas, chief among them managing the urge to commit suicide and not just treating underlying illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder or severe depression.” (Editorial Board, “Every 72 Minutes, A Veteran Commits Suicide; Our View,” [USA Today](#), 9/15/16)

Washington Examiner: VA Bureaucrats Have Proven “Incompetent ... Vicious, Malevolent And Self-Dealing.” “Through several separate scandals in the last two years, they have proven themselves not just incompetent, but vicious, malevolent and self-dealing on a level seldom witnessed even within the ranks of the federal bureaucracy, which is saying something.” (Editorial Board, “Veterans Deserve To Be Rid Of The Veterans’ Administration,” [Washington Examiner](#), 9/6/16)

Charleston Post and Courier: “VA Accountability Still Lacking.” “America’s veterans have sacrificed so much to serve our nation so well. They must not continue to suffer from incompetence — in many cases extended by outright deceit — from the agency assigned to serve their needs.” (Editorial Board, “VA Accountability Still Lacking,” [The Post And Courier](#), 8/31/16)

Jacksonville Times-Union: “The VA Needs To Make Major Reforms – Now.” “Congress continues to struggle with a Veterans Administration health care system that has consistently defied reform ... The fact is that as the nation’s second largest bureaucracy, the VA is going to act like one. It can’t help itself ...” (Editorial Board, “The VA needs to make major reforms - now,” [Jacksonville Times-Union](#), 9/26/2016)

Jacksonville Times-Union: “Too Often, Congress Simply Provides The VA With More Money With The Understandable Motive Of Supporting Veterans. But When Sweeping Changes Are Needed, Congress Has Been Unable To Force Them.” (Editorial Board, “The VA needs to make major reforms - now,” [Jacksonville Times-Union](#), 9/26/2016)

McAllen Monitor: VA Reform Has “Been Mired In Finger Pointing And Excuses From Washington.” “An absurd number of months waiting for medical care have unfortunately become the norm for hundreds of thousands of our nation’s veterans, including thousands in the Rio Grande Valley ... Yet despite a nationwide outcry over healthcare delays and poor service, this issue has been mired in finger pointing and excuses from Washington that has ultimately resulted in the compromise of the health of our nation’s veterans.” (Editorial Board, “Editorial: Improving Care For Veterans In The RGV,” [The Monitor](#), 9/20/16)

Sarasota Herald Tribune: “[T]he Failure To Perform Adequately Or To Safeguard Taxpayer Resources Is Not An Impediment To Continued Employment.” “VA staffers who don’t measure up still seem to enjoy all the perks of their posts — whether projects exceed budgets, taxpayer money is wasted on junkets or frivolous programs, military veterans have benefits halted after being wrongfully declared dead, or, as in the worst case from a couple of years ago, veterans who need medical attention at VA hospitals are wait-listed and ultimately die.” (Editorial Board, “Making it easier to trim the VA’s dead wood,” [The Herald-Tribune](#), 9/28/2016)

West Virginia Journal: “Dysfunction: VA Bonuses Enough To Make Us Scratch Our Heads.” “Many VA employees and officials are good, caring people dedicated to helping veterans. One wonders how many of them were bypassed for bonuses by a clearly dysfunctional agency.” (Editorial Board, “Dysfunction: VA bonuses enough to make us scratch our heads,” [The Journal](#), 9/29/2016)

Las Vegas Review-Journal: The VA “System-Wide Culture Of Indifference, Neglect And Malfeasance Has ... Dishonored Our Veterans.” “The Department of Veterans Affairs’ system-wide culture of indifference, neglect and malfeasance has not only repeatedly dishonored our veterans, but it continues to cost some their lives.” (Editorial Board, “VA troubles,” [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#), 9/29/2016)

Denver Post: The VA Is “Withholding Information” That Would “Be Helpful to Veterans Whose Care the VA Seeks to Provide and Taxpayers Footing the Bill.” “VA officials are [still withholding information](#) that could prove useful in getting to the bottom of how the Aurora facility blew past its expected price by more than a billion dollars. This week, VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson turned in transcripts of 18 interviews, when 71 exhibits were due... such information would be helpful to veterans whose care the VA seeks to provide and taxpayers footing the bill.” (Editorial Board, “Enough foot-dragging by VA on Aurora hospital reporting,” [Denver Post](#), 9/30/16)

News-Virginian: “Veterans Lives And Health Were Put at Risk by...an Agency That Owes Them The Best It Can Give.” “Officials have found boxes upon boxes of unprocessed paperwork in a private storage unit... We can only wonder what possessed this ex-employee to ignore the life-and-death implications of her actions... Incompetence? Sheer laziness? Perhaps she deserves some compassion — but the veterans deserve far, far more.” (Editorial Board, “Once again, veterans deserve better,” [The News-Virginian](#), 10/12/16)

Washington Times: President Obama’s Promises for “Comprehensive Reform” Have Been “Shoved Down the Memory Hole” As VA Continues to “Spiral Downward.” “When he ran for president the first time, in 2008, Barack Obama...said he would fix what was wrong at the [Veterans Administration](#), put an end to long lines and improve the quality of the care veterans deserve. He gave it a nice Washington name, ‘comprehensive reform.’ But soon the campaign was over and ‘comprehensive reform,’ as it usually is, was shoved down the memory hole. The VA, dysfunctional for decades, continued to spiral downward...” (Editorial Board, “More ‘Comprehensive Reform’ for Veterans,” [Washington Times](#), 10/12/16)

VA Reform Must Address Patient Wait Times, Employee Accountability, And Health Care Choice:

Chicago Tribune: Until Accountability Is Brought To The VA, “Count On More VA Scandals, More Excuses.” “No plan to revive the VA will succeed until superior performance is rewarded and poor performance is punished. Until then, count on more VA scandals, more excuses — and more American veterans cheated of the care they deserve.” (Editorial Board, “Money Won’t Fix What Ails The VA. Here’s How To Revive It,” [Chicago Tribune](#), 9/2/16)

Marietta Times: “Vets Deserve a VA That’s Accountable”. “Until and unless VA employees and officials are held accountable, the nation’s veterans may get substandard care — for which taxpayers will pay through the nose.” (Editorial Board, “Vets Deserve A VA That’s Accountable,” [The Marietta Times](#), 9/24/16)

Marietta Times: “Accountability Is Just a Word In Washington.” “How many VA officials have been disciplined because they were involved in the scandals? Very few. As seems to be standard procedure in government, accountability is just a word in Washington. It is more likely that a VA executive — many of them earn \$100,000 a year or more — will be sent home with pay than be discharged.” (Editorial Board, “Vets Deserve A VA That’s Accountable,” [The Marietta Times](#), 9/24/16)

Charleston Post and Courier: The Courts Should Not Interfere With The Ability To Hold VA Employees Accountable. “[J]udges should give Congress and future administrations some practical means of holding VA officials accountable for their actions.” (Editorial Board, “VA Accountability Still Lacking,” [The Post And Courier](#), 8/31/16)

Sioux City Journal: “One Of Our Biggest Gripes About The Federal Government Is Its Proclivity For Throwing Money At A Problem Without Accompanying Accountability. Continuing Problems, Including Excessive Wait Times For Veterans In Need Of Medical Care, Within The Department Of Veterans Affairs Provide Fresh Evidence Of This Troubling Reality.” (Editorial Board, “Our Opinion: Two Years After Scandal Erupted, VA Problems

Continue,” [Sioux City Journal](#), 8/28/16)

Sioux City Journal: Accountability “Must Be An Issue Moved To Near The Top Of The Priority List” For Congress And The President. “[I]t’s clear systemic problems persist and more work, including improved accountability, within the VA is necessary to elevate the level of overall care for veterans. For Congress, the outgoing Obama administration and the incoming administration of a new president, this must be an issue moved to near the top of the priority list.” (Editorial Board, “Our Opinion: Two Years After Scandal Erupted, VA Problems Continue,” [Sioux City Journal](#), 8/28/16)

Mcallen Monitor: Veterans Would Benefit From Access To “Multiple Private Sector Facilities And Doctor Offices.” “With nearly 30,000 veterans in Valley and no VA hospital here, our veterans deserve the best care our government can provide. Perhaps that will be found within multiple private sector facilities and doctor offices throughout the Upper and Lower Valley — which would prevent them, at least, from having to drive to San Antonio.” (Editorial Board, “Editorial: Improving Care For Veterans In The RGV,” [The Monitor](#), 9/20/16)

Star-Tribune: “The VA Shouldn’t Have to Be Reminded of Its Mission.” “...crisis calls routinely are allowed to go to voice mail. Sometimes callers in desperation get busy signals. A third of the calls that do get answered are rolled over to backup centers, where VA staffers have less training to deal with veterans’ problems...the VA shouldn’t have to be reminded of its mission. Such disregard demands reform from the top down.” (Editorial Board, “More calls for reform,” [Star-Tribune](#), 10/23/16)

It’s clear that despite billions more in taxpayer funding, the VA remains mired in mismanagement, controversy and dysfunction. Let’s take a look at the numbers:

- **[\\$182 Billion](#)**: President Obama’s Proposed VA Budget For 2017. The VA’s Budget Is On Track To Grow **[84% From 2009](#)**.
- **[\\$142,000,000](#)**: Bonuses Paid To VA Employees In 2014 When The Secret Wait-List Scandal Was Uncovered.
- **3-10 Weeks**: How Long New VA Enrollees Must Wait For Primary Care Appointments. (Government Accountability Office, March 2016)
- **293**: The number of veterans who were revealed to have died in Arizona waiting for health care on secret and official wait lists in the immediate aftermath of the VA scandal.
- **More Than 500,000**: Amount Of Appointments That Have Wait Times Of 30 Days Or More, An **[Increase Of 160,000](#)** Since October 2014.
- **91%**: Number Of Americans Who Agree That Veterans Should Be Able To Choose Where They Get Their Care.

Concerned Veterans for America recognizes the opportunity to bring real reform to the VA and [supports a bold plan](#) to help get there:

1. **Choice.** The [Caring for Our Heroes in the 21st Century Act](#)—draft legislation authored by U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA)—seeks to go to the root of VA problems by allowing the VHA to be run like a high-performance health care organization, rather than as a government bureaucracy. This would improve both accountability and access,

while allowing the system to right-size itself, which is projected to save money over the long term. Importantly, it would allow veterans increased choice in both private health care and VA providers.

2. **Accountability.** The [Veterans First Accountability and Appeals Modernization Act](#) – which passed the House with strong bipartisan support this year – would make it easier to fire bad VA employees at the senior level, protect whistleblowers who speak up, and would eliminate the backlog for disability claims. This bill would bring comprehensive accountability to the VA.
3. **Transparency.** The VA has a long track record of stonewalling Congressional oversight committees and not providing timely and accurate data. As a result, Congress, the media, and veterans groups get [an incomplete picture of the department's effectiveness](#). Congress must push for more frequent and robust VA reporting requirements.

VA reform has been urgently needed for years, from coast-to-coast. Please reach out to your elected officials, VSOs, friends, and allies, and remind them of the seriousness of this issue. For many veterans waiting for adequate health care, reforming the VA is a matter of life or death.

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