



**To: Interested Parties**

**From: John Cooper, CVA Press Secretary**

### **Summary**

Secretary McDonald has a credibility problem. Since arriving at the VA in July 2014, he has promised to clean up the department and fix the culture which led to the various scandals that have plagued it in recent years.

Those promises have proven hollow. While paying lip service to transparency and accountability, McDonald has largely opposed any meaningful reforms, and has made statements, many of which have been embarrassing to him and the department, that have significantly undermined his credibility as someone who can speak to the VA's problems and inspire confidence in his ability to accomplish reform. After reading this memo, ask yourself: if you were a veteran, would *you* trust Sec. McDonald?

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### **Undermining Veterans' Choice**

*The Washington Times*, February 3, 2015: ["VA Secretary McDonald defends Obama's Choice Card budget cut"](#)

- **"VA Secretary Robert McDonald** defended President Obama's budget request to cut some funding from the new Choice Card program for veterans, saying he wants the embattled department to be able to make decisions about whether the program is working and when to limit it."

### **Lying About Firings, Part I**

*The Washington Post*, February 18, 2015: ["No, the VA has not fired 60 people for manipulating wait/ time data"](#)

- "Yet **McDonald is incorrect** in saying that 60 employees who manipulated wait times were fired."
- "Employees are not fired unless they have been removed from their jobs — and as of two days before McDonald went on the air, there were eight employees who were removed for manipulating patient wait-time data. So **McDonald's statement** is incorrect."

*Politifact*, February 20, 2015: ["VA secretary claims 900 firings, 60 related to wait times, since he took over"](#)

- "If the first part of the claim has problems, the second part doesn't appear to be true in the slightest."
- "While the data shows that 900 people have been let go under McDonald, half those dismissals were probationary employees, meaning they were just starting work as the

scandal had come to light, or weren't even there when it was going on...More problematic is the claim that 60 people were fired in direct connection with the wait-time scandal...the number of terminated employees is well below **McDonald's stated number**.

### **Misrepresenting Military Service**

*Fox News*, February 24, 2015: [“VA Secretary Robert McDonald admits lying about Special Forces service, apologizes”](#)

- **“Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald** on Tuesday apologized for lying about serving in the special operations forces in a conversation with a homeless veteran that was caught on camera earlier this year.”
- **“‘I have no excuse,’** the website quoted McDonald as saying in its report. **‘I was not in special forces.’”**

### **Refusing to Fire People Involved in Wait List Scandal**

*The New York Times*, April 22, 2015: [“Few People Lost Jobs With V.A. in Scandal”](#)

- **“...in February, the new secretary, Robert A. McDonald,** asserted in a nationally televised interview that the department had fired 60 people involved in manipulating wait times to make it appear that veterans were receiving care faster than they were... Now, new internal documents show that the real number of people removed from their jobs is much smaller still: at most, three.”

### **Lying About Firings, Part II**

*The Arizona Republic*, November 6, 2015: [“VA secretary says 300 in waitl time scandal to be disciplined; records disagree”](#)

- **“Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald** declared Friday that his agency has proposed disciplinary actions against 300 employees in connection with a controversy over delayed care and falsified wait-time data, but VA records obtained by *The Arizona Republic* appear to contradict his assertion.”
- **“...a VA spreadsheet provided to committees on veterans affairs in the U.S. Senate and House list only two dozen instances where adverse personnel actions involved wait-time manipulation.”**

*The Washington Post*, November 10, 2015: [“VA secretary misstates the number of waitl time manipulation disciplinary actions — again”](#)

- **“This is the second time this year that we found McDonald inaccurately citing** the disciplinary actions taken against VA employees for manipulating wait-time data. There is a disturbing discrepancy between the figure **McDonald cited** during the speech and the figure his agency is reporting to Congress as cases directly related to patient wait-time manipulation.”

### **Approving \$142 Million in Bonuses Despite Scandals**

*The Hill*, November 18, 2015: [“VA secretary defends paying out \\$142M in bonuses”](#)

- **“The secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** is defending doling out more than \$142 million in bonuses to officials last year, despite the scandal in 2014

involving the deaths of veterans waiting for care at agency clinics.”

- “Officials who are managing the construction of a Denver facility, which is more than \$1 billion over budget and nearly four years behind schedule, received bonuses ranging from \$4,000 to \$8,000.”

### **Lying About Firings, Part III**

*Worcester Telegram*, January 14, 2016: [“VA chief brushes aside criticism he hasn't done enough to clean up agency”](#)

- **“U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert A. McDonald** on Thursday dismissed criticism that he hasn’t done enough to clean house at his agency...“That’s a red herring,’ Mr. McDonald said of a letter criticizing his leadership penned Wednesday by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.”
- “‘Since I’ve been secretary we’ve terminated over 2,500 people,’ he replied, later clarifying that not all those employees had been fired but that in ‘a lot’ of cases they retired after being charged by an administrative investigatory board.”

### **Punting on the Hard Choices**

*Military.com*, January 26, 2016: [“Former VA Executives Appeal to Have Demotions Overturned Again”](#)

- **“McDonald said** he knows the decisions are unpopular with Congress, but stands by the call made by Deputy VA Secretary Sloan Gibson...‘I have immense confidence, trust and even love for him,’ McDonald said. ‘When he tells me he’s gone through the evidence and the evidence does not support firing but supports demotion, I believe him.’

### **Comparing Wait Times to Disney World Lines**

*The Washington Examiner*, May 23, 2016: [“VA secretary: Disney doesn't measure wait times, so why should VA?”](#)

- **Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald** on Monday compared the length of time veterans wait to receive health care at the VA to the length of time people wait for rides at Disneyland, and said his agency shouldn't use wait times as a measure of success because Disney doesn't either.
- “‘When you got to Disney, do they measure the number of hours you wait in line? Or what's important? What's important is, what's your satisfaction with the experience?’ McDonald said Monday during a Christian Science Monitor breakfast with reporters. ‘And what I would like to move to, eventually, is that kind of measure.’”

### **Conclusion**

While we believe Sec. McDonald does care for veterans, his tenure as VA secretary shows that he is too incompetent or unwilling to challenge the status quo on their behalf. He has attacked his critics, stretched the truth to the breaking point and refused to hold bureaucrats accountable. Even recent “successes,” such as reducing the claims backlog, are clouded by dishonest representation and political gamesmanship. In many cases, he has made statements

that have led to public outcry or challenges to his honesty. Quite simply, he has lost his credibility in the VA reform debate.