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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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PATRICK MEEHAN
7TH DISTRICT, PENNSYLVANIA

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House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3807

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MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

August 5, 2014

Robert A. McDonald
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald,

I write to you today regarding the false and incomplete statements given to me by officials within your department.

On June 16, 2014, I visited the Victor J. Saracini Veterans Clinic in Horsham, Pennsylvania after it was flagged by the VA Inspector General for further investigation into appointment scheduling practices. I received a tour of the facility and a briefing from the leadership of the Philadelphia VA hospital system, including Philadelphia VA Director Daniel Hendee.

During the briefing, I was assured by Hendee and others that the cause of the additional scrutiny was simple clerical error. I asked very specifically whether this investigation would find evidence of intentional wrongdoing: manipulated data, falsified statistics or secret waiting lists. VA officials looked me in the eye and assured me that no misconduct had occurred and that any delays in care were the result of simple bookkeeping errors.

It is now clear from the VA access audit report released this week that these statements were untrue. The audit found evidence of manipulated data, falsified statistics and secret waiting lists. Nearly one third of schedulers at the Philadelphia VA interviewed said they had been told to falsify appointment dates. Specific information for Horsham was not provided, but auditors found employees "were encouraged to inaccurately enter ... [the desired dates] in an attempt to game [the] system."

In light of this information, I respectfully request answers to the following questions:

- What actions will you take to investigate these misrepresentations and hold VA officials accountable for their misleading statements?
- Does the Department have a policy requiring employees to speak truthfully to members of Congress conducting oversight? If so, what are the consequences of violations of this policy? If not, why not?
- What steps have been taken to address the findings of the audit and improve care for our veterans?
- Will you provide the site-specific data gathered at the Horsham clinic?

Countless VA employees – many of them veterans themselves – are doing their best to fulfill our promise to our veterans and ensure they get the care they deserve. But members of Congress should be able to trust the word of federal officials they speak with while fulfilling their oversight duties.

That trust has been broken. A culture of cover-ups appears to have taken over, and it must end.

I thank you for your prompt attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick Meehan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Patrick Meehan
Member of Congress