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January 15, 2016

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

Dear Secretary McDonald,

I write to you today regarding the appointment of Dr. Skye McDougall as Director of the South Central Veterans Administration Health Care Network (VISN 16). Despite your ongoing support for Dr. McDougall, I must respectfully convey my continued and absolute objection to this appointment.

In February of 2015, while serving as Acting Director of the Desert Pacific Healthcare Network (VISN 22), Dr. McDougall testified before the House Veterans Affairs Committee. In her testimony, Dr. McDougall stated that new patients within the Greater Los Angeles VAMC waited an average of just four days for an appointment. The following exchange took place during the hearing<sup>1</sup>:

Rep. Benishek: How long is the average wait time for a new patient at the greater LA medical center?  
Dr. McDougall: The average wait time for a new patient right now is about four days.  
Rep. Benishek: And is that true for mental health patients as well?  
Dr. McDougall: That is true for mental health as well.

As you are aware, this testimony provided by Dr. McDougall was later shown to be false, with wait times more than ten times longer than stated. According to a CNN report<sup>2</sup> released on March 14, the claim was "simply not true" and the actual wait time was 44 days. For mental health patients, the wait was approximately 36 days.

Following this fiasco, in October of 2015 Dr. McDougall was proposed to be the new Director of VISN 18, which includes the Phoenix VA Facility where at least 40 veterans are reported to have

died while waiting for care. Following considerable protest, the proposed appointment was withdrawn, and the VA instead proposed that Dr. McDougall lead VISN 16, which includes Shreveport's Overton VAMC where 37 veterans are reported to have died while awaiting care.

It is imperative that VISN 16 be managed by a director whose hands are clean of this scandal and who understands that acknowledging existing faults and holding those responsible accountable are the first real steps to fixing a broken system. I look forward to working with you to appoint a new director for VISN 16 that will move the VA forward in a manner befitting our nation's heroes.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Ralph Abraham, MD  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

<sup>1</sup>: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3088ri0oxwo>, 36:50

<sup>2</sup>: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/03/13/us/va-investigation-los-angeles/>