



Written by [Wallis W. Wood](#) on May 22, 2014

## The VA Scandal Proves What We've Been Saying All Along

Yet another whistleblower has come forward to accuse yet another Veterans Affairs hospital of keeping secret waiting lists to hide the delays for veterans needing medical treatment. According to *The Daily Beast*, officials at the VA hospital in Albuquerque, N.M., may have already destroyed some of the records there, to cover up what has been happening.

Sound like any government bureaucracy we've heard about before?



*The Daily Beast* said that a doctor who works at the Albuquerque VA hospital told them, "The 'secret wait list' for patient appointments is being either moved or was destroyed after what happened in Phoenix." Not only that, the same doctor says that when the scandal first broke, he heard one of the managers at the hospital say, "I always knew that Phoenix was better than us at playing the numbers game."

The news has gotten so bad that the American Legion has demanded that Eric Shinseki, the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, resign his post. Daniel Dellinger, the National Commander of the group, issued a statement saying, "His record as the head of the Department of Veterans Affairs ... tells a story of bureaucratic incompetence and failed leadership."

Moreover, Dellinger said, "The disturbing reports coming from the Phoenix VA Medical Center are just one of what appears to be a pattern of scandals that have infected the entire system."

So far, Shinseki has refused to budge. He told a congressional committee last week that he is "mad as hell" over the incidents. White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough says that "the President is madder than hell" about reports of treatment delays at VA hospitals around the Nation.

But none of this should come as a shock to Barack Obama. After all, back in 2007 he campaigned against what he described as the "deplorable conditions at some VA hospitals." He promised that when he became President, he would fight for our veterans "every hour of every day."

*The Washington Times* reported that after the 2008 election, the George W. Bush Administration warned the Obama transition team that there were problems at the VA. In fact, the paper quoted one briefing memo as saying, "This is not only a data integrity issue in which [Veterans Health Administration] reports unreliable performance data; it affects quality of care by delaying — and potentially denying — deserving veterans timely care."

So if the Administration was warned about problems at VA hospitals six years ago, why the total silence until now?

I can tell you the answer in one word: Obamacare. The President and his team were determined to do whatever it took to get Congress to pass the badly misnamed Affordable Care Act. A scandal at some of the hospitals the federal government ran wouldn't help the cause. So it shouldn't be surprising — maddening, yes; surprising, no — that any disturbing reports got swept under the rug.



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So far, the VA has admitted that 23 veterans died while waiting for medical care. But the *Dayton Daily News*, citing records it obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests, said the number is probably much, much higher. In fact, the newspaper reported that between 2001 and 2013, as many as 1,100 veterans may have died while waiting for care.

Nor was the faking of records about appointment times something new. The paper cited a review by the U.S. Government Accountability Office that was released in December 2012, in which it found that VA hospitals in several states routinely falsified how long a vet waited before getting an appointment.

"During our site visits," the review said, "staff at some clinics told us they change medical appointment desired dates to show clinic wait times within VA's performance goals."

In other words, regardless of how long a vet had to wait to see a doctor, the clinic would report that the appointment took place within 15 days of the time the patient applied. After all, that was VA's "performance goal." And how well a clinic complied with it determined who got raises, promotions and bonuses.

Yet now the White House claims that Obama learned about the latest scandals only when he saw the stories in the media.

With all of this righteous indignation, you'd expect that some heads would roll, wouldn't you? But so far, the only one to be dismissed is a guy who had already planned to retire next month. Robert Petzel, M.D., had announced last fall that he would leave his position as undersecretary of health at the VA in June. Bouncing him a couple of weeks early is certainly no big deal.

Nevertheless, when Obama's chief of staff appeared on CBS News, McDonough insisted, "There is no question this is a termination of his job there before he was planning to go."

The growing scandal at the VA simply confirms what we've known all along: The bloated bureaucracy that is the federal government is out of control.

That's why it's impossible to fire do-nothing employees who watch pornography several hours a day. It's also why some Internal Revenue Service employees who haven't paid their federal taxes can still receive bonuses at work.

I'm sure there are many kind, caring and competent people working at the VA — and in many other federal agencies, for that matter.

But the system is designed to protect the incompetent and, as we're learning with the VA, to reward lies, falsifications and cover-ups. The American Legion got it right when it said there is "a pattern of scandals that have infected the entire system."

Representative Jeff Miller (R-Fla.), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said, "What's missing from the equation is not money or manpower; it's accountability." He has introduced a bill in Congress that would make it easier to fire employees for poor performance. Senator Mark Rubio (R-Fla.) has introduced a companion bill in the Senate that would eliminate some of the red tape that makes it impossible to fire public employees.

Time will tell if the federal behemoth will take even these two tiny steps in the right direction. In the meantime, God help the veterans who depend on the VA for the medical help they need. They deserve better. And so do we.

Until next time, keep some powder dry.



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