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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

January 22, 2015

Via Electronic Transmission

President Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write today regarding the urgent need for a permanent Inspector General to lead the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Office of Inspector General (OIG). During 2014, the country became aware of many problems that veterans encountered at VA medical facilities around the country. Most recently, troubling news at the Tomah VA medical center (VAMC) in Wisconsin underscores the need for you to nominate someone to serve in this important position.

The problems surrounding the Tomah VAMC have led veterans and VA employees to question not only the leadership at the facility but at the VA Office of Inspector General.

I recently became aware of a March 2014 VA Inspector General report centered on a variety of allegations at the Tomah VAMC.¹ Some of the findings were more than troubling. The rate of opioid prescriptions at Tomah VAMC was disturbing enough that issues were brought to the attention of VA leadership. It was also noted that Tomah VAMC ranked highest in the Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN) for the total morphine equivalents per unique patients treated with opioids. These issues must be fully investigated for the veterans who rely on this facility for their healthcare.

Further, my office, among others, never received a briefing on the March 2014 Tomah VAMC report from the VA Office of Inspector General. I am currently seeking an explanation from the VA's Deputy Inspector General.

The VA Office of Inspector General has gone far too long without a permanent Inspector General. Former VA Inspector General Opfer made known his intentions to leave the post in November 2013.² Now over a year later this post remains empty and that is unacceptable.

¹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General. Administrative Closure. Alleged Inappropriate Prescribing of Controlled Substances and Alleged Abuse of Authority at the Tomah Medical Center. MCI# 2011-04212-HI-0267.

² VA Inspector General Opfer letter to President Obama. November 6, 2013. Accessed at: <http://www.va.gov/oig/articles/oig-ig-letter.pdf>

I am hopeful that you along with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) have narrowed down a list of candidates so we can work together to quickly fill this position.

Having a permanent Inspector General is necessary to root out waste, fraud, and abuse for the taxpayers and bring accountability for millions of veterans. I look forward to working with you to confirm a qualified individual to fill this important post.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ron Johnson", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right and a large loop at the bottom.

Ron Johnson
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs