

The conference committee report we have passed gives him two tools that are essential. It gives him the authority to hire and fire title 38 and title 5 employees. Title 5 employs the senior leadership and title 38 the next step in leadership down, which is what the VA needs. The VA is an organization of 340,000 people which in the last 3 years has averaged 3,000 disciplinary actions a year. Each of those disciplinary actions meant people were moved from one job to another within the VA and did not lose pay. There is no accountability in the VA and there really has not been. That is why the systemic problems on appointments and veterans services and everything else going on in the VA has not happened. By giving him the opportunity to hire and fire, he will have the respect and attention of those who work in the VA to understand full well they are going to have to carry out the game plan of this leader.

He understands metrics. He understands accountability. He understands leadership. He has taken a job he didn't have to accept, a job he didn't need to have to do at this time in his life, but a job he wants to do to give back to the country he loves and the country he served in the military.

I am confident Bob McDonald will be an outstanding Secretary of the Veterans' Administration, and I commend him to my fellow Senators with my highest recommendation in the hopes that he will be approved unanimously.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Thank you, Madam President.

I stand today also with high hopes that the new leadership at the VA will bring much needed changes to a department that is clearly, quite frankly, in a shambles, failing our Nation's veterans. During his committee hearing, the nominee Robert McDonald promised to bring a high level of accountability and transparency to the VA, two characteristics that are sorely needed. This is extremely important in an agency where under the leadership of the previous Secretary it would often take months to get answers to routine questions—or in many cases you would never get answers at all.

By the end of this week I am also hopeful that besides confirming the new Secretary, we will send to the President the Veterans Access Choice and Accountability Act. This important legislation includes many needed reforms to the VA, including bringing that accountability to the Department and actually providing our Nation's veterans with choices about where they can receive care.

The bill also, perhaps most importantly for Louisiana, finally authorizes much needed community-based clinics around the country, including two which have been long delayed in Louisiana by pure ineptitude and bureaucratic screw-ups at the VA—clinics and

expanded clinics in Lafayette and Lake Charles. For 4 years I have been fighting the Washington bureaucracy tooth and nail to get these new expanded outpatient clinics. They are vitally important to Louisiana veterans who now sometimes have to drive up to 4 hours to receive services that have been promised to them much closer to their community.

The current clinics in Acadiana are overcrowded and don't offer the full range of services that these new clinics will. As I said, VA ineptitude delayed the clinics in the first place. If it weren't for their mistakes, these clinics would actually already be built. When they were finally teed up and ready to go, then the Congressional Budget Office made a ridiculous decision that again threw these clinics into limbo because of a scoring issue out of the blue. Finally in December, the House was able to pass a bill that dealt with these CBO concerns that passed 346 to 1.

Normally when a bill passes with that sort of margin the Senate will quickly pass it by unanimous consent. Unfortunately, that didn't happen.

First we needed to attach an amendment to address some marginal concerns. Then even after we had done that—even after that received full agreement in the Senate, unfortunately Senate Democrats, led by the Chair of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, held up the legislation basically as a hostage to try to get a broader VA package. Actually I had to come down and ask unanimous consent for the House clinics legislation six times on the floor. Unfortunately, six times Senator SANDERS denied that unanimous consent. It was only after the VA scandal broke that momentum shifted and, thankfully, it looks as though we will finally pass this into law, the clinics legislation, along with this important reform bill.

When the authorization occurs, I strongly urge Mr. McDonald and the VA to streamline the process to get these two clinics built as soon as possible, given the long and arduous history of VA delays and screw-ups. The veterans of Louisiana have waited patiently, literally for years. These clinics are overdue. Let's get on with it. Louisiana veterans have had to wait for numerous delays caused by VA mistakes. The least the Department can do is to make sure these clinics are now built with the utmost haste and efficiency.

Thank you, Madam President. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate for approximately 4 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MCDONALD NOMINATION

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I have been a Member of Congress in both the House and in the Senate, and in my entire time as a Member of Congress I have served on either the House or Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. Over that time I have worked with nine Secretaries of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Today I am here to add my support and ask for the confirmation of someone who I believe will be the next Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Bob McDonald.

I had believed—I do believe—that a change at the Department of Veterans Affairs was necessary. I made clear that we needed to change the leadership at the top, and I believe this change is a good thing for the Department—the management of the Department, but, most importantly, for the veterans whom the Department is to serve.

I also know a change in the leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs in and of itself is insufficient to solve the problems our veterans are facing in access to health care and in the long time our veterans are required to wait to receive their benefits.

I have met with Mr. McDonald in my office. I also, as a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, had the opportunity to listen to him testify and to ask him questions in the confirmation process, and I was completely impressed by his candor, his sincerity, and certainly his commitment to serving our Nation's veterans. He is a leader in the tradition of the 82nd Airborne Paratroopers who are well regarded as the first to be called when there is a military emergency. As they say, when the President calls, the 82nd Airborne will answer. In my view, that is exactly what we have in Mr. McDonald. When the President called, he answered that call. He answered the opportunity to serve the veterans of this country.

When the President needed help, he found someone, in my view, who will dutifully fulfill the responsibilities of being a Cabinet Secretary and work on behalf of our Nation's veterans.

It seems to me there is no certainty in this world in which we know people for brief amounts of time, but it certainly seems clear to me that Mr. McDonald is the right person to lead the VA. He is willing and capable of restoring hope in veterans so they can trust the agency and the Department that was created for their benefit.

I asked the President—I don't know that he ever saw my request or certainly never probably listened to my request, but the plea was please nominate someone from outside the Department of Veterans Affairs. This gentleman, Mr. McDonald, while having

military experience, has a significant background of being the CEO of Proctor & Gamble, and in that position he was well-known for his value-based leadership, believing that “the best companies and leaders operate with a clear purpose and consistent set of principles or values.”

What the VA must do right now is to dismantle the bureaucracy, break down the culture of indifference, and review its commitment to the core values of the Department. There is no higher calling than to take care of the men and women who served our country.

Mr. McDonald shares that dedication to making certain our veterans have access to quality care—the best our Nation can offer—and he is focused and ready to take on the challenges that lie ahead. At least he convinced me that is the case.

There is now, fortunately, compromise legislation poised to pass both the House and Senate this week that will soon offer veterans more access to the quality care they deserve. Although this legislation is significant, it is impossible for Congress to mandate a change in attitude. Leaders can change attitudes at the Department. Congress does not have the power to control or develop a workforce that treats veterans like patriots, deserving care from a grateful nation, rather than to make them feel as though they are a burden.

Leadership throughout the institution, starting with Bob McDonald at the top, must command the VA to head down a new path of redemption and hope. We must create an agency that is more cost-effective, more compassionate, and more caring toward the veterans it serves. The VA must become an agency that is worthy of the service and sacrifice of our Nation’s veterans.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:35 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. BALDWIN).

NOMINATION OF ROBERT ALAN McDONALD TO BE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 2:45 p.m. will be equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, before I begin I do want to take a moment to commend the chairmen of the Veterans’ Affairs Committees in both the House and the Senate for their commitment to reaching a deal that puts our veterans first and gives the VA the tools they need to address immediate challenges.

More importantly, I really applaud their work to build and strengthen the VA system in order to continue to deliver the best care for our Nation’s heroes over the long term.

The deal they announced yesterday is a very important step toward addressing a lot of issues that we know exist within the VA system, but it cannot be the final step. As transparency and accountability increase at the VA, so will the investigations and reports of additional concerns, requiring even more action from the VA, from the administration, and from this Congress.

However, as Chairman MILLER said yesterday, we cannot legislate good character here in Congress. It is going to be up to the leadership at the Department of Veterans Affairs to truly enact those reforms.

So I have come to the floor today in support of the nomination of Robert McDonald, someone I believe has the skills necessary to make these necessary changes as the next VA Secretary.

As I told Mr. McDonald last week, he is faced with a truly monumental task. Even as we pass comprehensive legislation to bring significant reforms at the VA to reduce wait times, to improve accountability, there are still many serious challenges the VA must address.

Twenty-two veterans still take their own lives each day. Thousands of veterans are alone, coping with sexual assaults. And while the Department has made commendable progress, it will be an uphill battle as we work to eliminate veterans homelessness and the claims backlog. Mr. McDonald will have to grapple with these and many more issues—all on day one.

When I met with Mr. McDonald in my office a few weeks ago, he told me he was one of the veterans who was lost in the system during his transition from military life to civilian life. So I trust—I trust—he understands what a critical moment this is for the VA and why we must finally fix many of these systemic and cultural challenges.

We have all made a promise to those who have signed up to serve. So I encourage my colleagues to support this nomination. I am hopeful the steps we are taking here this week on behalf of our Nation’s heroes will finally ignite the much-delayed reforms our veterans have been demanding and they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BURR. Madam President, I stand today not to rehash with my colleagues the crisis that exists at the Veterans’ Administration or to share it with the American people. They know the story, and especially our Nation’s veterans, who have been given the runaround.

I am here to highlight a success in the Senate. See, my colleagues, on July 7, 2014—not even a month ago—we received the nomination for the new VA Secretary from the President.

On July 22 of this month, we had a confirmation hearing on that nomina-

tion. On July 23—the next day—Robert McDonald was passed unanimously out of the committee. Today—before the end of July—we are on the Senate floor to confirm Robert McDonald as the next VA Secretary.

I rise to urge my colleagues to support this nomination. The VA needs a confirmed Secretary in place to begin a long, arduous process of reform and cultural change.

By now, our colleagues probably know that Bob McDonald is a veteran himself. He is a graduate of West Point. He served 5 years in active duty, and served most of that time at Fort Bragg, NC. So I consider him one of ours.

He spent more than 30 years working for Procter & Gamble—I think the most competitive manufacturing company in the world. His work led him across the globe. But he also had prominent roles at a number of other organizations—Xerox, United States Steel Corporation, and the Business Roundtable.

Mr. McDonald has frequently lectured to groups on leadership skills, and his leadership philosophy was highlighted in the book “The Leader’s Compass.” He is the type of leader we need at the VA at this very crucial time.

Bob McDonald clearly has the experience to run an organization as large and as diverse as the Department of Veterans Affairs. Perhaps more importantly, he has selflessly agreed to take the challenge of leading the VA at its most critical time—something many people might have passed on.

I hope this week, in addition to this nomination, we will pass legislation to help the VA and its next leader address the systemic problems with access to VA health care and a corrosive culture that led to this crisis. But that legislation would be just one step. An enormous amount of work must be done from within the VA to rebuild its reputation and to turn it into an agency that will live up to the expectations of our veterans and a nation grateful to them for their service. We need a strong leader to do that, and I am glad Robert McDonald has agreed to serve his country once again in this important role.

The nomination received the unanimous support of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee. I urge my colleagues: Confirm Robert McDonald as the next Secretary of the VA, and let’s get on with the important work of reform at that agency.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SHELBY. Madam President, my colleague from North Carolina has just spoken on behalf of the nomination of Robert McDonald to be the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and I will do likewise. He has also spoken of his background as a graduate of West Point, as an Army officer, and as the CEO of one of the largest companies in the world.