

# Vukmir campaign: Despite Baldwin's efforts to hide it, the Tomah VA report became public

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## **Despite Baldwin's efforts to hide it, the Tomah VA report became public**

**Brookfield, Wis.** — Nearly nine months after Senator Baldwin learned about the situation about abuses at the Tomah VA and refused to release the information to the public, the Inspector General's report was released and Senator Baldwin admitted wrongdoing.

**“Senator Baldwin let us down by sitting on the Inspector General's report that detailed the problems at the Tomah VA that endangered veterans,”** said Leah Vukmir campaign manager Jess Ward. **“Faced with making the problems known and addressing them, Senator Baldwin chose to protect her political career with a cover-up.”**

## **BACKGROUND ...**

**January 25, 2015** - Baldwin released a press release defending her reaction to Tomah VA allegations. “When my office was first contacted by a constituent last March with concerns about the Tomah VA we immediately brought those concerns to the Tomah VA and then to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs headquarters in Washington D.C., and the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG). I am very upset by the fact that when we took action to bring forward our constituent's concerns, the Tomah VA, its regional parent organization, the VA Great Lakes Health Care System,

and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, were not forthcoming that an OIG investigation was initiated by others in 2011.” ([Press Release](#), 1/25/15)

**January 19, 2015** – It was made known to the public that Baldwin had the Inspector General’s report for months but never took action. “Sen. Tammy Baldwin’s office received an inspection report last summer detailing high amounts of opiates prescribed at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Tomah, but there is no indication her office took action on the findings until last week, when she called for an investigation after a news report revealed a veteran died from an overdose at the facility. The report by the VA inspector general, a copy of which was obtained by USA TODAY, noted that two practitioners at the center were among the highest prescribers of opiates in a multistate region — at ‘considerable variance’ compared with most opioid prescribers. That, the report said, raised ‘potentially serious concerns.’” ([The Green Bay Press-Gazette](#), 1/19/15)

**January 8, 2015** –VA Inspector General McDonald, Senator Baldwin, Senator Johnson and Congressman Kind take action after the center for investigative reporting disclosed the findings of the inspection report and details of Simcakoski’s death. “The Center for Investigative Reporting reports the findings of the inspection report and details of Simcakoski’s death. As a result, McDonald, the VA inspector general, Johnson, Baldwin and Kind take action, launching and calling for investigations.” ([USA Today](#), 3/17/15)

**December 2014** – When Baldwin’s office still had not taken action, Honl sent a message to her staffer with the subject line: “final plea for help from Senator Baldwin.” “In them the whistleblower — former Tomah VA employee Ryan Honl — asked that Baldwin call for an investigation, that she push colleagues on the Veterans Affairs committee to take action, and that she help bring the issues in the report to public attention. The report had not been made public, but Baldwin’s office received a copy in August. When she still had not taken public action in December, Honl sent a message to her staffer with the subject line: ‘Final plea for Help from Senator Baldwin.’ ‘All we ask is that our senator publicly support our desire to have an open forum rather than remain silent publicly, which is what the VA does in hiding reports from the public,’ Honl wrote.” ([The Green Bay Press-Gazette](#), 1/19/15)

**November 11, 2014** – Ryan Honl – Tomah VA whistleblower – learned about an inspection report that Baldwin’s office had a copy of and after getting a copy of the report, Honl repeatedly contacted Baldwin’s office calling for an investigation and to make the report public, but Baldwin did not. “Honl learns from a friend about the

existence of the inspection report and that Baldwin's office has a copy. He later persuaded the friend to get him a copy. After reading it, he barraged Baldwin's office with emails for several weeks asking that she call for an investigation and make the report public. She did not." ([USA Today](#), 3/17/15)

**September 26, 2014** – Ryan Honl an employee at the Tomah facility, sent a letter to VA Secretary Robert McDonald, Senator Baldwin, Senator Johnson and Congressman Kind expressing concerns about opiate prescriptions and patient health and safety. “An employee at the Tomah facility, Ryan Honl, sends messages to VA Secretary Robert McDonald, Kind, and Baldwin expressing concerns he heard from current and former employees about opiate prescriptions. He also sends a message to Sen. Ron Johnson noting he had ‘grave concerns’ about ‘patient health and safety.’” (“Tomah VA Scandal,” [USA Today](#), 3/17/15)

**August 29, 2014** – The VA Inspector General sent Baldwin a copy of their previously unreleased report. Baldwin then forwarded the report to the constituent and stopped pressing the matter. “The VA inspector general provides Baldwin with a copy of the previously unreleased report. She turns it over to the constituent and apparently drops the matter.” ([USA Today](#), 3/17/15)

**April 7, 2014** – Baldwin wrote to the Tomah VA Medical Director after receiving a constituent complaint, but she was told everything was fine. Baldwin later asked the VA and VA Inspector General for an investigation. “Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, responding to a constituent's complaint about opiate prescriptions in Tomah, writes to Tomah VA Medical Director Mario DeSanctis. He assures her everything is fine. The senator later writes to the VA and the VA inspector general asking for an investigation.” ([USA Today](#), 3/17/15)