

Vukmir campaign: Leah exposes Tomah Tammy's cover-up In new ad

Posted on Wednesday, Sep 26, 2018

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Leah Vukmir

★ U. S. SENATE ★

Contact: [Jess Ward](mailto:jess.ward@sen.wisconsin.gov), (608) 213-5939

Brookfield, Wis. — Nurse, military mom, and U.S. Senate candidate Leah Vukmir issued released a new television ad Wednesday calling Tammy Baldwin out for her lies and exposing her failure and cover-up at the Tomah V.A. The ad will air across Wisconsin.



Watch the ad [here](#).

"You've got some nerve, Senator Baldwin.

"Saying a nurse doesn't care about patients? You knew about the opioid crisis at the Tomah VA, and you did nothing.

"A veteran died. You offered taxpayer dollars in exchange for silence and hired Hillary Clinton's lawyer to cover it up.

"I've spent my life helping patients. You've spent yours playing politics, and it cost veterans their lives.

"I'm Leah Vukmir and I approve this message."

[Watch the ad here.](#)

BACKGROUND...

Tomah Tammy 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)

The VA Inspector General sent Tomah Tammy a copy of their previously unreleased report. Tomah Tammy 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)

Marine Veteran, Jason Simcakoski, Died From An Overdose As An Inpatient At The Tomah VA. "Marine Corps veteran Jason Simcakoski, 35, dies from an overdose as an inpatient at the Tomah VA Medical Center. Two days earlier, Tomah practitioners decided to add another opiate to the 14 drugs he was already prescribed. The cause of death was 'mixed drug toxicity.'" ([USA Today](#), 3/17/15)

Ryan Honl an employee at the Tomah facility, sent a letter to VA Secretary Robert McDonald, Tomah Tammy, Ron Johnson and Ron 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.'" ([USA Today](#), 3/17/15)

Ryan Honl, the Tomah VA whistleblower, resigned from his job. "Honl resigns from his job at the Tomah facility and begins peppering the officials he first contacted with emails about problems at the medical center." ([USA Today](#), 3/17/15)

Honl 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 Tomah Tammy 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)

When Tomah Tammy'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)

VA Inspector General McDonald, Tomah Tammy, Ron Johnson and Tom 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)

It was made known to the public that Tomah Tammy 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)

Tomah Tammy released a press release both defending and acknowledging wrongdoing in the Tomah VA scandal. "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)

Tomah Tammy offered a top staffer a taxpayer-funded settlement, but it required silence regarding Tomah. "A former top staffer to U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin has rejected a proposed severance deal that would have required her to remain silent regarding what she knew about the problems at the troubled Tomah VA Medical Center. ... 'The deadline has passed, and Marquette rejected the offer,' said one source close to Baylor. A second source said the issue is now 'in the senator's court.' 'Marquette didn't want to be hogtied by the deal,' the second source said. 'She can now move on without any restrictions.'" ([Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel](#), 1/26/15)

Days after initial reports that Tomah Tammy failed to act on the issues at Tomah, she fired her Deputy State Director, Marquette Baylor, "without explanation." "Under fire for her office's inaction over alleged overmedication at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Tomah, U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin abruptly ousted one of her top state staffers late last week. Marquette Baylor — deputy state director for Baldwin and chief of her Milwaukee office — was let go on Thursday without explanation. Baylor has been offered a cash payout as part of a severance package if the former aide agrees to keep her lips zipped. 'It looks like they're trying to pin the blame on her,' a source said of Baylor's dismissal by Baldwin." ([Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel](#), 1/26/15)

Tomah Tammy wouldn't even disclose that she fired a top aide or that she offered her a taxpayer-funded settlement. "Baldwin and her staff won't even acknowledge terminating Baylor. More important, they won't disclose the proposed five-figure severance deal offered to Baylor that would have required her to keep quiet about the Tomah mess." ([Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel](#), 1/26/15)

Tomah Tammy hired Hillary Clinton's lawyer, Marc Elias, to help her deal with the Tomah VA scandal. "Sen. Tammy Baldwin has hired a powerful Washington lawyer to represent her as she continues to grapple with the fallout from her office's handling of the Tomah Veterans Affairs crisis. Attorney Marc Elias offered the first public acknowledgment on behalf of Baldwin that she fired top Wisconsin aide Marquette Baylor for her actions after the senator received a critical inspection report about opiate prescription practices at the Tomah VA Medical Center." ([Milwaukee-Wisconsin Journal Sentinel](#), 2/19/15)

Tomah Tammy's campaign paid nearly \$90,000 to Hillary Clinton's lawyer and political fixer Marc Elias. "U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin's campaign spent nearly \$140,000 on legal advice from one of the left's major 'political fixers' since 2011, according to federal documents obtained by Wisconsin Watchdog. The brunt of those legal fees — nearly \$90,000 — were paid out in 2015, when the Madison Democrat was embroiled in a scandal involving the scandal-plagued Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Baldwin's campaign paid Washington, D.C. attorney Marc Elias \$87,779 in 2015, according to filings with the Federal Election Commission. The campaign cut a check for \$41,704 to the firm on March 27, 2015, during the thick of the scandal, and issued payment of \$38,558 on May 21, 2015, according to campaign expenditures. There were other smaller payments." ([Watchdog.org](#), 3/17/17)

Tomah Tammy's Fired State Director, Marquette Baylor, Filed An Ethics Complaint Against Baldwin Accusing Her Of Engaging In A Political Cover-Up Regarding The Mishandling Of The Tomah VA Issue. "A former staffer for U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin has filed an ethics complaint accusing the Madison Democrat of engaging in a political cover-up by firing the aide. Marquette Baylor — former deputy state director for Baldwin and chief of her Milwaukee office — was fired from the \$80,800-per-year job in January for her alleged role in the mishandling of a whistle-blower complaint about problems at the troubled Tomah VA Medical Center. Baylor turned down a severance deal that contained a confidentiality clause." (Daniel Bice, "Fired Staffer Accuses Tammy Baldwin's Office Of Coverup In VA Scandal," [Milwaukee-Wisconsin Journal Sentinel](#), 4/20/15)