

VA Disneyland Analogy Creates Storm of Negative Comments



VA Secretary Robert McDonald put both his corporate feet in his mouth this week when he suggested that veterans should not complain about the long wait time for an appointment to see a doctor at the VA. After all, said McDonald, people waiting in line at Disneyland never complain. It's not about the wait, he said. It's about the satisfaction of the experience once you get there.

[Mr. McDonald](#) made the remark while fielding questions from reporters at a Christian Science Monitor breakfast with reporters. it's hard to believe that anyone talking to the media would not think long and hard about what they say.

[CNN coverage with video](#)>>>

This has to be one of the most insensitive organizational faux pas yet. And it created a storm of negative comments in the mainstream media and online. McDonald's [refusal to apologize](#) just fuelled the fire.

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If what the VA just did happened at **Disneyland**, someone would be FIRED for sure

allenbwest.com/allen/if-what-...



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David Armano follows



Paul Ryan @SpeakerRyan · May 26

The brave men and women who sacrificed so much for our freedom and safety deserve so much better from the **#VA**.



Secretary McDonald Compares VA Lines to Disneyl...

The VA is not the happiest place on earth—far from it. Veterans have died waiting in line for health care at VA facilities.

speaker.gov

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SenDanSullivan @SenDanSullivan · May 24

#VA Sec comparing wait time 2 waiting 4 ride @ Disneyland is offensive, undermines little confidence vets have left.

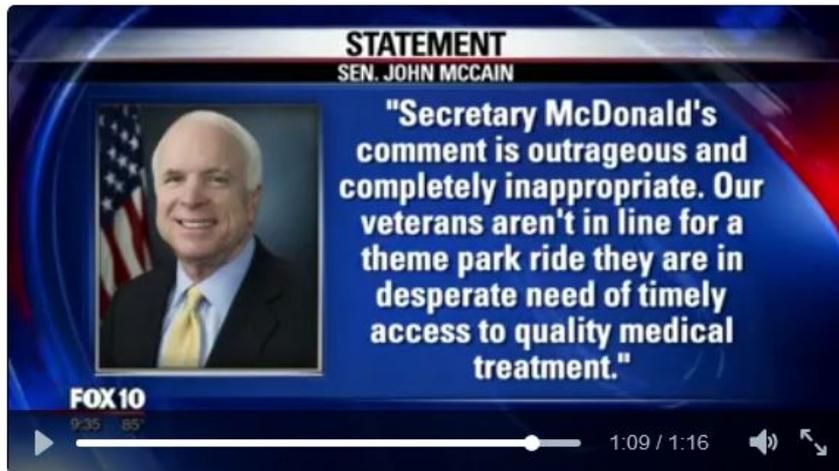


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Team McCain @TeamMcCain · May 24

ICYMI: McCain Blasts VA Secretary Remarks about VA Wait Times being like "Disneyland". #AZSen #Veterans



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The backlash from angry congressmen, senators, veterans and concerned citizens was reported in the media and spread rapidly across social media channels as the coverage was shared and reposted. Several GOP officials have called for McDonald to resign.

The VA already has it's PR challenges, but this recent gaffe has pushed it to the edge.

PR Lessons:

1. Make sure every executive who speaks publicly in any forum has had media training.
2. Create approved messaging and sound bites for executives who speak for the organization.
3. Run "ambush" scenarios where execs are put under fire and have to respond quickly off-the-cuff.
4. We live in a 24/7 media world and everyone has a platform and a voice. Your mistakes will go viral.
5. If you do make a mistake, don't duck the issue. Own it right away and apologize.
6. "I misspoke" is a lame excuse and does not constitute an apology.