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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE April 13, 2011

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Construction Contracting Processes Examined In-Depth

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing entitled "Inspect What You Expect: Construction Contracting Practices at the Department of Veterans Affairs." The hearing focused on the practices used by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) throughout the contracting lifecycle, including the transparency of the use of taxpayer dollars.

The hearing focused on VA's Electronic Contract Management System (eCMS). Implemented in 2007, eCMS's goal was to consolidate information in a single database, tracking VA dollars and actions in contracting processes to provide greater oversight and accountability. Despite the Department's own mandate to utilize eCMS, VA has not been enforcing its use in the contracting process to its fullest capability.

"It is past time for these billions of construction contracting dollars to be used effectively, efficiently, and in a timely fashion so the veterans who need the services provided by these facilities can access them," said Rep. Bill Johnson (OH-06), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

Belinda Finn, the Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations at the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG), testified about a 2009 OIG report regarding VA's lack of using eCMS. Her testimony noted a study conducted by OIG that found up to 83 percent non-compliance on eCMS usage at the time.

"If we are to get this right, there must be decisive leadership in contracting and accountability for actions at all levels," Johnson stated.

VA acknowledged shortcomings with the Electronic Contracting Management System (eCMS) and noted upcoming improvements to the system.

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