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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Jeff Miller, Chairman, 335 Cannon House Office Building, Washington D.C. 20515

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CONTACT: Amy Mitchell (202) 225-3527

VA Admits Problems at Medical Facilities are a Failure of Leadership

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing entitled, "Sacred Obligation: Restoring Veteran Trust and Patient Safety," regarding the failure to act and haphazard notification processes on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) concerning medical sanitization processes at major VA facilities including those in Miami, Florida, St. Louis, Missouri, and Dayton, Ohio.

"This is unconscionable. Imagine having survived the battlefield to return home, visit a VA hospital, only to receive a letter in the mail years later stating you may be at risk of having contracted an infectious disease because of the improper sterilization of medical equipment. These incidents shatter the very trust we all assume on behalf of our veterans," stated Representative Jeff Miller (FL-01), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

The Committee was disconcerted by the apparent lack of leadership VA has demonstrated in handling these issues to date.

Since the issues in Dayton, stemming from actions by a dentist employed by VA from 1982-2010, came to the public's attention, VA has not fully enacted accountability in its systems nationwide with regard to medical practitioners in order to avert such incidents in the future.

"Without the leadership of Chairman Miller and this Committee, veterans in our district would not have known about these egregious violations of basic medical standards. The VA owes us a clear explanation of the events that have occurred and have yet to release to our community, documents which show that they taken every step necessary to notify veterans that may have been infected by the dentist in question," said Representative Mike Turner (OH-03), who represents the Dayton area and joined the Committee for the hearing.

"The time for talk is over. VA must confront these issues head on, deepen the obligation to care for the veterans affected by these incidents, and make the necessary changes within the VA healthcare system to prevent any future incidents that put our veteran patients at risk," said Miller.

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