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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Reviewing the VA Construction Planning Process

WASHINGTON, DC — Today, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held its first "Deconstructing the Department of Veterans Affairs Construction Planning" hearing to discuss the transition of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) construction planning process from a five-year to a 10-year plan.

The hearing focused on examining VA's capital asset planning and construction plan detailed in the VA FY2012 construction authorization budget request. The discussion revolved around underutilized and vacant properties; evaluation and consideration of alternatives to planned investments; and prioritization of new projects and renovations.

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) stated, "VA must ensure that all cost-effective options are considered, all bias acknowledged, and due diligence conducted as it moves forward in its capital asset planning. Comprehensive planning on the front end will prevent massive cost overruns and project delays down the road."

Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, W. Scott Gould acknowledged that "on average, VA buildings are more than 60 years old." Further, Secretary Gould noted that with introduction of SCIP (the Strategic Capital Investment Planning process), "VA has instituted a rigorous capital planning process that quantifies and prioritizes the need to repair, upgrade, dispose of, or replace VA's aging infrastructure and address the current and future needs of America's veterans within the context of prudent capital investment decision making."

Despite discussing the incorporation of private sector practices into the new construction plan, Gould expressed reluctance in having an independent third party review its ongoing and future construction projects.

"We need more transparency and scrutiny of the decision-making process to ensure veterans' needs are the top priority. There must be a comprehensive review of the spectrum of care provided — from VA hospitals to VA clinics to outpatient services in this planning process," Miller said.

Raymond Kelley, national legislative service director for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) concurred, stating, "If Congress is willing to fund [an independent third party review], it can't hurt."

A follow-up hearing on the VA's 10-year construction plan is expected in the coming weeks. Tribute was also paid to former Representative and Committee member, John Adler, who passed away yesterday, with a moment of silence at the start of the hearing.

For more news from House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, please go to:

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