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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 28, 2012 CONTACT: Amy Mitchell (202) 225-3527

VA Leadership Needs to Step Up and Fix Spending Problems to Better Serve Veterans

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Despite repeated bipartisan requests made by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs regarding conference spending, foreign travel, and other information pertaining to VA healthcare and operations, senior VA officials admitted today that requests made by Congress are delayed internally, but that even when information is provided, it is frequently wrong.

Stemming from [an earlier investigation that found nearly \\$1 million of taxpayer dollars, monies taken from VA healthcare accounts, was wasted during two VA HR Conferences in Orlando, Florida](#), last year, the hearing this morning focused on receiving answers to the 75 outstanding requests made to VA.

“Lengthy delays or not responding to requests at all has become the norm,” stated Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. “First we were told \$20 million was spent in FY2011 on conferences; then we were told it was a little over \$100 million; finally we were told that no accurate, reliable figure on conference expenditures exists. Because of these discrepancies, Ranking Member Filner and I asked for clarification of VA’s total conference spending for that year and prior years, as well as a breakdown of all individual conferences, and still have yet to receive any information.”

The hearing also focused on the subject of VA foreign travel. The Committee has made several requests since August for all information regarding any foreign travel made by VA employees over the past three years. To date, the Committee has yet to receive an answer to basic questions. [Pictures, posted on VA’s official Facebook and Twitter pages however, of a trip through Italy were shown at the hearing](#) to senior VA leadership.

“We are trying to determine if these photos of a European field trip represent evidence of a boondoggle or not,” Miller said. “At best, these are pictures of a privately funded vacation posted on a government website. At worst, this was a taxpayer financed trip with no known legitimate purpose. We will get to the bottom of this, but without the Administration providing timely and accurate information, it risks perception becoming reality in the eyes of this Committee and veterans.”

In an effort to staunch the excess spending, the House passed a bill last year, which VA opposed, to increase accountability and oversight of VA conference spending. H.R. 2302 ensures that all VA conferences costing more than \$20,000 be reported to Congress. The bill became law earlier this year as part of the [Honoring America’s Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012](#).

“We clearly have a problem here and I intend to get to the bottom of it, both with respect to conference spending and VA’s relationship with this oversight Committee,” said Miller.

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