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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 14, 2012 CONTACT: Amy Mitchell (202) 225-3527

Stakeholders Lose Confidence in VA Fee-Basis Care

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, the Subcommittee on Health held a hearing entitled, “VA Fee Basis Care: Examining Solutions to a Flawed System.” The hearing was in response to findings that the current fee-basis system is having an adverse effect on those it was originally intended to help.

Over the past three years, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) has released seven separate reports revealing a multitude of problems facing the program, including serious concerns regarding oversight, as well as millions of dollars wasted through improper payments.

“Recent years have seen tremendous growth in VA’s Fee Care program, with independent assessments estimating growth of close to 300 percent from fiscal year 2005 to today,” said Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Health. “Unfortunately, as the program has continued to grow, so have the management and oversight problems that have plagued the system through which VA provides care to veterans outside the walls of a VA facility.”

As an attempt to correct the troubles facing the program, VA has developed two new initiatives. The Subcommittee, however, remained skeptical of VA’s new plan.

“The Department testified today that these two initiatives will address all of the challenges the Fee Program faces and ‘ensure veterans receive effective and efficient non-VA care seamlessly,’” Buerkle said. “I wish that I could believe that was true. However, given the history of failure we’ve seen already, I have serious reservations that the actions VA is taking will address the core challenges it faces and not simply lead to further fragmented care and an inability to deliver quality care in rural communities.”

Correcting the current problems in the system, before initiating new programs, or starting over, remains critical to the success of the program Subcommittee members expressed.

“And, at the end of the day, what fee-basis care is about is the effective and efficient delivery of care to veterans where they need it, when they need it,” said Buerkle. “Getting it right is about honoring their preferences, choices, and daily lives as well as their service to our country.”

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