

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell said today that President Bush's proposal to slash the Department of Veterans' Affairs Inspector General's budget by 5 percent is "absolutely irresponsible" and comes at a time "when America's veterans need our support more than ever."

The President this morning released his budget which proposed to reduce the VA Office of Inspector General's budget to \$77 million for FY 2009.

"It is absolutely irresponsible to make deep cuts to the VA's watchdog when hundreds of thousands of veterans need the VA to make improvements," said Mitchell, who serves as the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "The Inspector General is an essential, independent, nonpartisan check against waste, fraud and abuse, and is one of the best ways of ensuring accountability at the VA during a time of war."

The Inspector General "provides Department-wide audit, investigation, health care inspection, and management support functions to identify and report weaknesses and deficiencies that create conditions for actual or potential fraud and other criminal activity, mismanagement, and waste in VA programs and operations." [Source: [President's Proposed VA Budget](#) , Feb. 4, 2008]

The most recent Semiannual Report of the VA Inspector General showed that every dollar spent on operations returned 10 dollars in potential waste, fraud, and abuse. Additionally, the Office contributed to 157 indictments, 275 arrests, and 177 convictions, in the six months reported. [Source: [Semiannual Report: April 1 to Sept. 30, 2007](#) , Nov. 30, 2007]

Mitchell will hold a hearing on the budget for the Office of Inspector General and Information Technology Systems on Feb. 13.

In December, Mitchell's Subcommittee held a hearing on long waiting times for appointments at Veterans' Health Administration facilities. The Inspector General found that the VHA had been overstating appointment waiting times and that schedulers were not following established procedures. Following this report, the Under Secretary for Health issued Directive 2006-055 to

improve the scheduling process. [Source: [Testimony of Ms. Belinda J. Finn](#) , Dec. 12, 2007]