

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today said that reports that the Department of Veterans' Affairs [misled Congress about wait times for injured veterans seeking medical care](#) are “very serious” and that the “credibility of the VA has reached a historic low.”

Earlier today, the Associated Press reported that the VA “repeatedly understated wait times for injured veterans seeking medical care and in many serious cases forced them to wait more than 30 days, counter to department policy, an internal investigation shows.” [Source: [Associated Press](#), Sept. 11, 2007]

“This isn’t the first time the American people have been misled by top officials at the VA,” said Mitchell. “We were misled about the VA budget only to see those responsible [receive lavish bonuses](#). When you see misleading information, and see those responsible rewarded, it raises serious questions. And when you see a pattern of misleading information like this, that seems to repeatedly paint the VA as doing a better job than they actually are, I think you have to start asking questions of intent, not just competence. This is shameful. Those responsible need to be held accountable.”

Mitchell serves as Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, and today called for the [Veterans' Affairs Committee](#) to look into the matter.

The AP wrote “the Veterans Health Administration in recent months falsely reported to Congress that nearly all of its appointments — about 95 percent — were scheduled within 30 days of a patient’s requested date. In fact, only three in four veterans — 75 percent — received such timely appointments.” [Source: [Associated Press](#), Sept. 11, 2007]

VA Undersecretary for Health Michael Kussman [repeated those false claims](#) to Congress in April. [Source: [Associated Press](#), Sept. 11, 2007]

“While waiting time inaccuracies and omissions from electronic waiting lists can be caused by a lack of training and data entry errors, we also found that schedulers at some facilities were interpreting the guidance from their managers to reduce waiting times as instruction to never put patients on the electronic waiting list... This seems to have resulted in some ‘gaming’ of the scheduling process,” the Inspector General’s report found. [Source: [VA Inspector General Report](#), Sept. 10, 2007]

This is not the first time the VA has misled Congress, our nation’s veterans, and the American people.

Earlier this year, top VA officials were paid the “most lucrative” bonuses in government at the same time they may have “deliberately misled taxpayers” in an effort “to justify Bush administration cuts to health care amid a burgeoning Iraq war.” [Source: Associated Press, May 3, 2007]

The Government Accountability Office “determined the VA had used misleading accounting methods and claimed false savings of more than \$1.3 billion, apparently because President Bush was not willing, at the time, to ask Congress for more money.” [Source: [Government Accountability Office](#)

, September 2006;

Associated Press

, May 3, 2007]

Instead of receiving disciplinary action, those who used “misleading accounting methods” received record bonuses. In May, the AP reported, “Months after a politically embarrassing \$1 billion shortfall that put veterans’ health care in peril, Veterans Affairs officials involved in the foul-up got hefty bonuses ranging up to \$33,000.... Among those receiving payments were a deputy assistant secretary and several regional directors who crafted the VA’s flawed budget for 2005 based on misleading accounting. They received performance payments up to \$33,000 each, a figure equal to about 20 percent of their annual salaries.” [Source: Associated Press, May 3, 2007]