

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, the Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, said today that Secretary Jim Nicholson's resignation from the Department of Veterans' Affairs provides the President with an opportunity to do better by our nation's veterans.

Mitchell made the following statement:

"Secretary Nicholson's move to the private sector provides a much-needed opportunity to improve health care and other vital services for our nation's veterans.

"I hope the President will use this opportunity to nominate a new Secretary committed to working with the new Congress, in a bipartisan way, to improve health care for America's veterans. We must work together to restore a spirit of cooperation on this important issue, and make sure that our returning soldiers receive proper care for their physical and mental injuries and reduce the backlog of 400,000 to 600,000 veterans who are currently waiting for treatment or benefits."

Under Nicholson's tenure, 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]

Just two months ago, in response to a [round of questions by Mitchell](#) at a committee hearing, Nicholson acknowledged that he was "unaware" that appointments for veterans receiving care for post-traumatic stress disorder ("PTSD") may be delayed up to 90 days, demonstrating the Secretary's lack of familiarity with what his own department [has told](#) the General Accounting Office.

Earlier this year, the GAO reported that "VA may face a challenge in meeting the demand for PTSD services. VA officials estimated that follow-up appointments for veterans receiving care for PTSD may be delayed up to 90 days." [Source: [General Accounting Office Report](#) , March 5, 2007]

According to the Associated Press, under Nicholson's watch, "the backlog of claims" of veterans who are currently waiting for treatment or benefits has reached "ranges from between 400,000 to more than 600,000, with delays averaging 177 days." [Source: [Associated Press](#) , May 4, 2007]