

*Also welcomes support for advanced funding of veterans' medical care*

SCOTTSDALE - U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today released the following statement in support of President Obama's announcement that the Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are taking the first steps to modernize and streamline medical care for military personnel and veterans by creating a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic record, and for the President's support of advanced funding of veterans' medical care:

"For too long, men and women of the military have had great difficulty in transferring their medical records from the Defense Department to their VA doctors. After all of the sacrifices they've made for our country, they deserve better and our government can do better.

"I applaud President Obama's commitment to move this process forward. DOD and the VA have taken far too long to get the ball rolling. In Congress, I will continue to work through the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to keep pressure on both agencies until our veterans have a seamless interoperable electronic records system that allows them to receive the care they've earned."

The Joint Virtual Lifetime records, when completed, will contain administrative and medical information from the day an individual enters military service, throughout their military career, and beyond to when they become a veteran. This reform has been long requested by veterans' and military service organizations.

Mitchell also said:

"I also welcome the President's support for advanced funding of veterans' medical care. We must ensure that veterans get quality care when they need it and that it is not delayed due to funding hold ups."

Mitchell is the Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and has been a leader in the fight for interoperable electronic records for veterans.

In 2007, after holding hearings on the issue, Mitchell offered an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, which authorized a pilot program between the DOD and the VA aimed at more effectively sharing medical records. The amendment was adopted by Congress and signed into law.

With the DOD and VA slow to react, Mitchell has sponsored a new bill, HR 1872, the Secure Electronic Military Separation Act, requiring the agencies to come up with an electronic form that both departments would be able to view and use to replace the paper forms that service members fill out upon separation from the military.

Rep. Mitchell is also a cosponsor of H.R. 1016, Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009, which would require advanced funding for VA medical care.