

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – July 28, 2010**

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(Washington, DC) - **U.S. Senator Richard Burr**, the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Ranking Member and **House Science and Technology Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight Chairman Brad Miller** (D-NC) have sent a letter to General Eric Shinseki, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, requesting a full accounting of how \$6.3 million designated for the study of traumatic brain injury for veterans has been spent and a full description of all other research being conducted on this serious injury.

"The Veterans Administration needs to explain diverting millions set aside to provide clinical services and research on traumatic brain injuries suffered by our returning soldiers," **Chairman Miller** said.  
"The money was simply not used as it was intended."

In 2004, the VA transferred \$6.3 million to the Central Texas Veterans Health Care Services (CTVHCS) to establish a brain imaging center to study the treatment of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), more pronounced and more common in current wars because of the size and the signature of the weaponry being used to attack individual soldiers.

In a letter dated July 23, 2010, **Chairman Miller** and **Senator Burr** wrote, "the center was to use MRI equipment at the University of Texas in Austin to treat and monitor thousands of TBI

veterans in Texas. The center, called the Brain Imaging and Recovery Laboratory (BIRL), opened in January of 2006, but the VA did not hire a center director/brain researcher until January 2007. When Dr. Robert Van Boven arrived to head the center, he found that more than \$2 million had already been spent, some of it for a study of diabetic retinopathy which had no relationship to traumatic brain injuries or the overall purposes of the center."

Dr. Van Boven was removed as center director, reassigned and terminated after raising concerns about the misuse of the funds.

"Congress understood the need for further research into Traumatic Brain Injury and appropriated funding for critical VA research on TBI," **Sen. Burr** said. "In return, the VA squandered its funds and missed an opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge on these complex battlefield wounds. I have called many times for greater transparency in the VA. This letter seeks clear answers about the shoddy administration of the Brain Injury and Recovery Laboratory in yet another effort to reinforce the need for proper oversight and responsible spending at VA."

A VA's Office of Inspector General determined that none of the funds had been used for clinical services for traumatic brain-injured veterans or research that would result in effective treatment and concluded that funds were misspent or used improperly.

In 2009, the brain imaging project was removed from the University of Texas and placed in the VA's Center of Excellence for Research on Returning War Veterans, a Waco facility affiliated with the Texas A & M Medical College. By that time, there was only \$2 million left of the original funding which would be used to fund the move and terminate the facility lease at the University of Texas.

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\*\*\*Copy of Letter attached\*\*\*