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ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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May 11, 2010

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
100 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

Hundreds of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have reported that they are now suffering from a variety of serious health issues, including asthma, severe bronchiolitis, chronic coughs, skin infections, Parkinson's disease, leukemia, and rare cancers. Experts have hypothesized that these illnesses may be linked to toxic exposures, poor air quality, contaminated water, and improper waste management in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am firmly committed to ensuring that we properly assess these illnesses, determine their causes, and provide the appropriate medical treatment to U.S. troops and veterans.

Our experience with Agent Orange taught us that we must remain vigilant when confronted with returning soldiers who suffer from rare and often difficult to diagnose illnesses.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, with jurisdiction over "any matter." Under Rules X and XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee is investigating the illnesses that have been reported by military personnel and civilian workers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. To assist the Committee in its investigation, please provide the following information and records:

1. All reports, studies, and memorandums addressing the rates of cancers, neurological disorders, and respiratory illnesses in veterans, active military personnel, and civilians serving in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001;

2. The number, type, and age of onset for all tumors occurring in active or retired military personnel that were reported to the Department of Defense (DoD) tumor registry from 1992 to 2001;
3. The number, type, and age of onset for all tumors occurring in active or retired military personnel that were reported to the DoD tumor registry from 2002 to the present;
4. All environmental assessments, risk assessments, reports, or memoranda since 2001, examining potential health effects associated with military sites in Iraq or Afghanistan related to air quality, wastewater contamination, waste management, or toxic exposures;
5. All complaints or allegations since 2001 involving health or environmental effects related to waste management or toxic exposures;
6. All reports, assessments, and studies conducted by DoD or at the request of DoD regarding potential health effects related to waste management, including burn pits;
7. All manuals and reports since 2001, related to DoD policies and procedures regarding waste management and the disposal of hazardous materials;
8. A list of all military sites in Iraq and Afghanistan which have operated burn pits since 2001, including information regarding:
 - a. Dates of operation;
 - b. Sizes of burn pits;
 - c. Distances from troop living quarters, guard towers, and dining and recreational facilities;
 - d. Number of civilians, contractors, and military personnel employed at the site;
 - e. Types and amounts of materials disposed of in burn pits on a weekly basis;
 - f. Descriptions of procedures employed to dispose of burn pit ash;
 - g. All entities that have constructed, designed, managed, or overseen burn pits, including documentation detailing their responsibilities; and
 - h. All documentation authorizing the establishment of burn pits.

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
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Please deliver the requested information and records to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, room 2157 Rayburn House Office Building, no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, May 21, 2010. To facilitate delivery and review, we prefer that the records be delivered in digital form. Please note that the terms "records" and "relating to" are defined in the attachment to this letter.

Should you have any questions, please contact Neema Guliani, Steven Rangel, or Lisa Cody of the Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Edolphus Towns
Chairman

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Darrell Issa
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

ATTACHMENT

1. The term "records" is to be construed in the broadest sense and shall mean any written or graphic material, however produced or reproduced, of any kind or description, consisting of the original and any non-identical copy (whether different from the original because of notes made on or attached to such copy or otherwise) and drafts and both sides thereof, whether printed or recorded electronically or magnetically or stored in any type of data bank, including, but not limited to, the following: correspondence, memoranda, records, summaries of personal conversations or interviews, minutes or records of meetings or conferences, opinions or reports of consultants, projections, statistical statements, drafts, contracts, agreements, purchase orders, invoices, confirmations, telegraphs, telexes, agendas, books, notes, pamphlets, periodicals, reports, studies, evaluations, opinions, logs, diaries, desk calendars, appointment books, tape recordings, video recordings, e-mails, voice mails, computer tapes, or other computer stored matter, magnetic tapes, microfilm, microfiche, punch cards, all other records kept by electronic, photographic, or mechanical means, charts, photographs, notebooks, drawings, plans, inter-office communications, intra-office and intra-departmental communications, transcripts, checks and canceled checks, bank statements, ledgers, books, records or statements of accounts, and papers and things similar to any of the foregoing, however denominated.
2. The terms "relating," "relate," or "regarding" as to any given subject means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, identifies, deals with, or is in any manner whatsoever pertinent to that subject, including but not limited to records concerning the preparation of other records.