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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 19, 2010

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

Hundreds of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have reported that they are now suffering from a variety of serious health problems, 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.

As previous experience has shown, it may take years to definitively understand the relationship between toxic exposures and illnesses. However, 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 studies, reports, memoranda, and analyses since January 1, 2001, relating to the acute and long-term health risks associated with toxic exposures in Iraq and Afghanistan;
2. All studies, reports, memoranda, and analyses since January 1, 2001, comparing the health of veterans who were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan with other veterans, with respect to respiratory health, neurological disorders, cancer rates, or toxic exposures;

3. All studies, reports, memoranda, and analyses since January 1, 2001, relating to evidence of toxic exposures in veterans or active military personnel who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan, including toxicity levels detected in blood tests, tissue analysis, or other medical testing;
4. All guidance provided to doctors or other medical personnel regarding the treatment of veterans or active military who have been exposed to burn pits or other environmental hazards since January 1, 2001;
5. All records relating to health effects associated with the burning of hazardous or non-hazardous waste;
6. All records relating to the need for independent, third-party assessments by non-governmental scientific experts to determine the health effects of burn pit or other toxic exposures;
7. All records since January 1, 2001, relating to the issue of whether toxic exposures in Iraq and Afghanistan should be treated as a service-related disability;
8. All policies and guidance relating to the determination of benefits for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who have been exposed to environmental hazards, including burn pits;
9. All preliminary results or evaluations of the current investigation being conducted by the Institute of Medicine assessing the potential health effects of burn pits;
10. All complaints or allegations received by the VA since January 1, 2001, relating to health or environmental effects associated with waste management or toxic exposures in Iraq and Afghanistan;
11. All records relating to the validity or methodology of the 2007 study conducted by the Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine at Joint Base Balad on the health effects of burn pits; and
12. All records related to the Veterans Affairs' decision not to include illnesses commonly associated with burn pit exposure in the list of illnesses presumptively associated with military exposure.¹

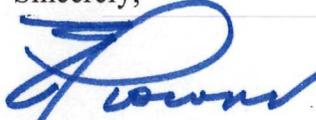
Please deliver the requested information and records to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, room 2157 Rayburn House Office Building, no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, May 28, 2010. To facilitate delivery and review, we prefer that the records be delivered in digital form. Please note that the terms "records" and "relating to" are defined in the attachment to this letter.

¹ See "VA Recognizes "Presumptive Illnesses in Iraq, Afghanistan" (Mar. 18, 2010). <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1869>

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
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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," or "relate" 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.