

MINUTES OF THE SENATE FEDERAL AND STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Senator Nancey Harrington at 10:30 a.m. on February 7, 2001 in Room 245-N of the Capitol.

All members were present.

Committee staff present: Dennis Hodgins, Legislative Research Department
Nikki Kraus, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Representative Dan Thimesch
Dr. Lea Steele, Director of the Kansas Persian Gulf War
Veteran's Health Initiative Program, Kansas Commission on
Veteran's Affairs

Others attending: See Attached List

Chairman Harrington opened the meeting by introducing Representative Dan Thimesch, who presented his testimony on "Project Honor" concerning the Persian Gulf War and the illnesses of veterans of that war. (Attachment 1).

Dr. Lea Steele presented a slide show packet of materials addressing what the Kansas Persian Gulf War Veteran's Health Initiative Program studied and the conclusions which had been reached thus far. (Attachment 2).

Chairman Harrington then asked for questions and recognized Senator Brungardt, who asked if the length of time that soldiers were exposed to possible contamination affected their illness. Dr. Steele stated that such a correlation had not been proven.

In response to another question from Senator Brungardt, Dr. Steele explained that studies had been compared in an effort to gain an objective analysis of problems such as the deterioration of chemicals in the brain, streptococcus infections, and medical concerns with microphalga which had occurred in veterans both within and outside of Kansas. She stated that the federal government had begun a new \$12 million study of new antibiotic drugs to fight these infections. Dr. Steele said that the majority of the illnesses reported have been neurological.

In response to a question from Senator Barnett, Dr. Steele stated that there was a variance in rashes which had been reported, ranging from small blotches all over the skin to large pustules and circumstances in which the skin is essentially falling off.

Senator Barnett asked if there was any chance that other symptoms had possibly been caused by Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, but Dr. Steele said no because of the specific and shared symptoms of the veterans with the Gulf War illness.

In response to additional questions from Senator Barnett, Dr. Steele stated that when a veteran receives medical treatment for a condition, doctors often run tests and find nothing. Then, after further questioning, it is often apparent that they have other conditions similar to fellow Persian Gulf War veterans. In terms of figuring out the exact cause for the illness, Dr. Steele stated that psychiatrists felt it was a physical problem, and that internists felt that it was a mental problem, thusly proving that neither side could understand the causes. She stated that many have not had much luck getting disability for their illness, even in severe cases.

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In response to a question from Senator Gilstrap, Dr. Steele said that not all veterans with the illness had received multiple vaccinations before or during the wartime period, but that some who had the illness had the vaccinations even though they had not been deployed.

Senator Gooch asked how many Kansans had been included in the study if about 7,500 had served or been involved with the Persian Gulf War, and Dr. Steele that the sample had included 2,030 veterans as a random sample to represent all Kansans.

Senator Gooch asked if any studies had been done on veterans who had been involved in similar situations but had not been from the United States. Dr. Steele stated that there had been comparisons with soldiers involved in the Balkans, but that there had not been similarities. She went on to say that studies on British, Canadian, and Danish veterans had drawn similar conclusions about veterans, but that the French had not. She stated that the French situation was interesting because none of their troops had taken the recently developed anti-nerve gas pills.

The committee continued with various discussion, and Chairman Harrington asked for further questions, but there were none.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m. The next meeting is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. on February 8, 2001.