EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. KAREN McCARTHY

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, March 24, 2003

Ms. McCARTHY of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, during rollcall vote No. 82, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present, I would have voted ''nay.''

TROOPS SHOULD RECEIVE REQUIRED MEDICAL SCREENINGS

HON. DENNIS MOORE

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, March 24, 2003

Mr. MOORE. Mr. Speaker, with our country's troops now entering into active combat in Iraq, I want to bring to your attention and to the attention of my fellow Representatives an issue made even more timely by the events of the past twenty-four hours.

On March 13th, I sent to Defense Secretary Rumsfeld a letter which I am including in the RECORD with this statement. I encouraged the Secretary to assure that all troops entering the Iraqi area receive medical examinations before and after deployment. The Kansas City Star recently carried an informative article, also included here, summarizing a law enacted by Congress in 1997 that requires such physical and mental screening of our troops, due to the many unexplained illnesses that followed service in the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Our fighting men and women serving in the Middle East face a genuine, immediate threat of biological and chemical weapons. We owe them no lesser level of service and dedication than they are providing in defense of our country. I hope all members of Congress will join with me in ensuring that the commitments made to the members of our Armed Forces in 1997 are kept in 2003 and afterward.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, March 13, 2003.

Hon. DONALD RUMSFELD,
Secretary, Department of Defense, The Pentagon, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SECRETARY: I am writing to express my concern regarding a recent article I read in the Kansas City Star March 5, 2003, entitled: ''Troops are not receiving medical screenings required by 1997 law.'' I have enclosed the article for your review.

The article asserts that troops entering the Iraqi area are not receiving medical examinations before and after deployment. As you know, Congress mandated in 1997 that all troops receive such tests to help in identifying future ailments such as Gulf War syndrome which has been extremely difficult to document and treat following the 1991 Gulf War.

I strongly urge the Department of Defense follow the 1997 mandate and if the DOD needs help fulfilling this mandate to accept the Veterans Administration's offer of help to collect and maintain medical information on all troops entering southwest Asia.

I look forward to your response on this important matter.

Very truly yours,

DENNIS MOORE,
Member of Congress.

[From the Kansas City (KS) Star, Mar. 5, 2003]

TROOPS ARE NOT RECEIVING MEDICAL SCREENINGS REQUIRED BY 1997 LAW

(By David Goldstein)

WASHINGTON.—Troops heading for the Iraqi theater are not getting health screenings, especially blood sampling, mandated by a law Congress enacted in 1997.

The law, which grew out of concern about unexplained illnesses that followed the 1991 gulf war, required that troops receive mental and medical examinations before and after deployment overseas. The tests are intended to provide clues in case the phenomenon known as gulf war syndrome should recur.

Instead, the Pentagon requires only a brief, one-page questionnaire asking for general health-related information. A top Pentagon health official said blood tests would not be especially useful.

About 300,000 American personnel are now at jumping-off points near Iraq or on their way. Many consider U.S. troops much more likely than in the 1991 war to face biological and chemical weapons.

''The majority of the troops have already deployed . . . and therefore we're not going to have a good picture of their health,'' said Steve Robinson, a gulf war veteran and executive director of the National Gulf War Resource Center.

''Once again, if soldiers are exposed, we do not have baseline (medical) data required to document their status. You're looking at gulf war illness 2.''

The Pentagon insists that it has followed the law.

''If the intent was to make sure we had better documentation—yes, we are in compliance,'' said Michael Kilpatrick, a physician who is deputy director of deployment health support at the Pentagon.

Veterans affairs activists, health care expects and congressional watchdogs are unconvinced.

The law, signed by then-President Bill Clinton, was enacted in response to a chorus of health complaints from gulf war veterans. Many reported a variety of ailments, including headaches, memory loss, rashes, equilibrium problems and loss of motor skills.

The causes were unknown, despite numerous medical studies. Some veterans pointed to the release of chemical or biological agents when Iraqi stockpiles were bombed, the military's hurried vaccinations against those agents, desert diseases and parasites or pollution from burning oil wells.

The syndrome has caused a bitter battle between veterans and the Pentagon, which has refused to recognize it, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, which has had to decide whether claims for medical compensation are valid.

Democratic Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, a former veterans affairs activist, called the Pentagon's program troubling.

''What's the message we're sending to our troops around the world today and those prepared to fight in Iraq?'' he asked. ''The message seems to be, 'Do your duty to country, but your country won't fulfill its duty to you if you're lucky enough to return home.' ''

Kerry, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004, has asked the General Accounting Office to investigate whether Defense has met its requirements.

In addition, leaders of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs have asked for a detailed account of Pentagon efforts to track medical data on battlefield troops.

Last month, Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi wrote to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and said the VA wanted to work closely with the Pentagon to collect ''health and exposure data'' on those deployed in southwest Asia.

''Much of the controversy over the health problems of the veterans who fought in the 1991 war with Iraq could have been avoided had more extensive surveillance data been collected,'' Principi wrote.

Mark Brown, a VA toxicologist who has been investigating gulf war illnesses, said Principi's letter was intended to put the VA ''on the public record'' about its concerns.

The Pentagon's approach, he said, ''certainly wasn't adequate in the first gulf war. Have they learned their lesson and done better? Maybe we'll be pleasantly surprised.''

The law requires the Secretary of Defense to ''establish a system to assess the medical condition of members of the armed forces,'' including reserves, deployed outside the United States for combat, peacekeeping missions or humanitarian operations.

Kilpatrick said the Pentagon's program was ''an evolving process'' and part of a concept called ''Force Health Protection'' that was put in place during the Kosovo conflict in 1996.

Some health officials with the Defense Department appear not to have known what Congress required.

Some gulf war medical researchers proposed a study to the Pentagon a year ago that would track some troops in post-Sept. 11 military operations. The proposed study unknowingly mirrored the elements of the law, and a medical official wrote back, ''This sound like something we need to investigate further as something we could like to support.''

The project involved studying the Rhode Island National Guard. David Haines, an immunologist affiliated with George Washington University, said he discovered a month ago that the Department of Defense was supposed to be doing the blood sampling that he and his colleagues had proposed to do on a small scale.

''We will do the right thing and step back if DOD is doing great things, but we don't believe DOD has anything like that in place,'' he said.

According to Kilpatrick, a brief questionnaire is basically the military's response to the congressional mandate because it has other steps already in place.

In the questionnaire troops are asked how they would rate their health, from excellent to poor. They are also asked whether they have any medical or dental problems, whether they have any health concerns, whether they wear glasses and whether they have concerns about possible ''exposures or events during this deployment.''

Anyone answering ''yes'' to certain questions will be referred for further examination. Rick Weidman of the lobbying group Vietnam Veterans of America, calls the questionnaire ''absolutely useless from an epidemiological point of view.''

''There's nothing about susceptibility to skin rashes or any of the derivative diseases that are due to some of these kinds of exposures,'' he said, ''and there is no psychological exam. Nothing.''

According to Kilpatrick, troops are asked whether they have sought mental health counseling within the past two years, but the military has to rely on personnel being truthful.

''If people say, 'My mental status is fine,' we are not stopping to engage in a three-hour survey to assess people's mental status,'' Kilpatrick said. ''If we are preparing to deploy 20,000 troops, it's physically impossible.''

A key element of the 1998 law is the taking of blood samples to establish a medical baseline and help identify possible subsequent exposures to toxic materials. The absence of