

Ranking Member Richard Burr

## STATEMENT OF SENATOR RICHARD BURR

Hearing on Research into issues surrounding Gulf War Illness

Good morning Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for holding this hearing. And I want to welcome all of you here today to continue what has become a long discussion on this very important topic.

Mr. Chairman, nearly 16 years after the end of the Gulf War, questions about the health of those veterans who served in that conflict still spurs passionate responses from tens of thousands of veterans across the country. This passion was ignited after many years spent fighting a government who told them it was all in their head instead of trying to treat their illnesses. And that was wrong. What we now know is that as many as 175,000 veterans from the first Gulf War report a whole host of illnesses and health difficulties that have affected their lives, their careers, and their families.

Over the past fifteen years, we have seen evidence of their suffering. Many of them suffer from fatigue, memory loss, joint pain, and skin rashes at significantly higher rates than their non-deployed Gulf War brethren. We have found evidence that suggests that ALS, a difficult and debilitating disease, seems to afflict veterans of this conflict at nearly twice the rate we would expect to see. And we have first hand accounts of ill parents who are giving birth to ill children. They believe those illness were caused by their service in the Gulf War. One of those mothers is with us this morning.

What we still don't know, is why all of these people who shared the common experience of service in the Gulf War are suffering from these problems.

Over the past fifteen years, our nation has spent well over \$300 million on research. Yet, we still don't have an answer. While I am frustrated by this lack of progress, I remain heartened by the fact that we know more now than we did when we started. I am also heartened by what I see as an emerging consensus. And that is whatever the cause of the health problems experienced by Gulf War veterans, we know one thing - they are real. The best thing we can do now is to find out how to treat them.

To that end Mr. Chairman, I would like to see our research efforts continue to focus heavily on treatment for our veterans. If all of our scientific energy cannot provide an answer to why they are sick, I hope we can help at least manage their ailments.

Mr. Chairman, I'm looking forward to hearing from the first panel about where we stand in the fight to care for those who fought for us in the Gulf War. I hope that we've done some things right instead of continuing to repeat past mistakes. And I hope to hear our second panel focus some on what DoD and VA are doing collectively to provide care and treatment to the brave men and women who fought the first Gulf War and are still fighting today.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing. I look forward to the testimony and to continuing to explore this critical topic.