

"Good morning Congressmen of the VA House Health Subcommittee and to all staffers and attendees. It is indeed an honor to testify at this hearing for all Operation Desert Storm Veterans which reflects only one part of the earlier portion of the Iraq War. It has been since November 1993 that we have been having hearings on the care and needs of Gulf War Veterans. I am retired USAFR Major Denise Nichols a tactical Aeromedical Evacuation Nurse Officer that was sent as far as the border of Saudi Arabia and Iraq to care for those wounded in that war. I have continued that duty as a sworn obligation. I am just one of the 697,596 that were deployed in 1990-91.

My profession, life, and family have been directly affected as has been so many others. The symptoms and life changes I have experienced are not unique. The war changed our health status and our abilities to perform our duties and our chosen life roles through no fault of our own.

There are hundreds of thousands of human case examples both those that were deployed and those that received vaccines and exposures from secondary sources.

In 1994, I told a gathering of ill veterans, DOD officials, VA officials, and University Professionals at Bethesda Attending the Conference held on the Health Consequences of the Persian Gulf that we Gulf War veterans were different. We were a force of highly trained, educated, and physically fit men and women who had served our country in wartime and even through we were now damaged due to that time in a foreign country we would not give up and we would find answers and help. Since then we have battled for compensation, the exposing of the full truth and nothing but the truth, we have battled for the best care and treatment. Sadly our war has been facing our own government. But as Major Hebert said so long ago we did swear to defend against all enemies both foreign and domestic. Sadly the battle against the domestic end of that has been the lack of faith and sworn duty in our own government.

The Gulf War Veterans community has deteriorated health rise at a rapid rate, we have lost too many of our own, but we still stand pushing, prodding, encouraging to get to the truth and to life saving that has been denied for too long. We were met with denials, delays, and resistance. But yet if you had listen and acted many of our lives could have been saved and restored. WE asked for the best diagnostic procedures and treatment. We were denied that by lack of truth from our own DOD and government officials. Some but not all of the truth has been exposed, we felt that more would have been exposed to back up our acknowledge of the multiple exposures that taken alone or in combination would have an affect on our health. We pushed for the medical examination and diagnostic testing that would expose the truth held within each of our bodies. We pushed for the Care and Treatment we earned by putting our lives on the line to serve our country. Sadly we have been delayed by forces within our own government. We would win a major firefight in that battle to face a counterattack or a blocking move. WE still wonder why is it financial, is it a policy, is it protecting some secret? But that answer and the battle our government raged to

find the single cause of exposure while we lay wounded still continues. Those of us with an undying spirit and faith would push the wounded each time to raise up and fight for yourself, your fellow soldier/veteran, your family, and the future soldiers and veterans to reach the goal.

Within my longer supplied testimony is a recap of just a few of the insights or snapshots of the road we have traveled in regards to the VA. I have supplied yet again a point paper of an ACTION Plan or if you want to call it an OP order outline to fix the broken parts to move forward to the goal of appropriate medical care. The system was not broken by us but the result of a multitude of errors complicated by a government or its employees that denied us the access to the best medical care for whatever reason. It has costs us lives of your fellow Americans, your soldiers, your veterans, and their family members. In one three month period of GWVIS data reporting in the past we lost 1,000 of us to whatever causes. The full count is most definitely more. This is morally and ethically wrong.

In our path we have met many civilian experts that have volunteered to help us out of that morally and ethically wrong drive to fix this, sadly many of their careers have been negatively affected through their joining the battle.

We have officers and individuals that have tried to help from the shadows will it is time for the all out assault to fix this result. The veterans have led this battle and we are not done. WE hope that each of our elected representatives will listen to us and join us to fix these problems, remove the roadblocks, and move for true action.

Let us move forward together to the best diagnosis, care, treatment, and compensation before we lose more lives. The veterans have identified something that is critically important and that could affect every citizen in this country through the response to critical hazardous substances - WMD and environmental exposures- examples are the WTC, the anthrax exposures, radiation damage, and potential terrorist use in our own country. The advances made through us could help save lives in the future throughout the US and other countries. WE need the funding and the commitment from all. Will you do your part to correct the errors, mismanagement, misguidance, obstructions of the past? Will you commit the funds and the fast tracking of corrective legislation? Will you be the active leaders to investigate, deliberate, and be part of the solution? But please if you are you must move quickly and decisively in order to save lives! Help us to streamline the process to get the pinpointed research that is needed, help us to get the right diagnostic care and an effective treatment. Do not study, investigate, or deny each of us to the grave.

We need to blend research to actual diagnosis and care in a cost and time sensitive manner. We can gain from the clinical data that can be obtained at a cost effective means within each VA hospital and merge it with research efforts to find better diagnostic markers that can be quickly implemented in the clinical area. We need to have our VA care organized so that research for treatment by

way of treatment trials can be moved into the clinical arena

in an expedited manner at true cost effectiveness. WE need universities to cut their cost of research business so that we can use funds provided in the most effective way to implementation. Universities should share their commitment to the troops and veterans and not make a profit off of the endeavor. We can do this in weapon development with tiger team approaches and field the instruments of war in record time can we do the same to save our troops and veterans?

Will you have faith in us the veterans and those civilians as doctors and researchers and members of the Veterans Affairs Research Advisory Committee that have committed to help? Will you put the full weight of this government and its resources to this task? Our remaining lives and quality of our lives depend on you.

Thank you very much for this honor to appear before you today. I would be delighted to answer any questions you may have".