

Parliamentary Activity - Gulf War Issues

2nd September 2008 – 4th February 2009

September 2008

Monday 29th September:

[Written Answer: Gulf War Veterans](#)

Lord Morris of Manchester asked Her Majesty's Government:

Further to the Written Answers by Baroness Taylor of Bolton on 12 December 2007 (WA 54—55) and Lord Hunt of Kings Heath on 4 June (WA 58) about the handling of the case of Gulf War veteran the late Mr T E Walker, what further information they have on the inquest into his death and its outcome.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord Hunt of Kings Heath): The Newcastle-upon-Tyne coroner is conducting the inquest into Mr Walker's death. He adjourned the inquest in December 2007 at the request of Mr Walker's parents' solicitors, so that he could receive and consider further representations about its scope. We understand that the coroner is still waiting for the representations from the solicitors and he has recently written to them to clarify the position. The coroner will decide when to resume the inquest in the light of the response received.

October 2008

Monday 13th October:

[House of Lords Written Answer: War Pension Appeals](#)

Lord Morris of Manchester asked Her Majesty's Government:

What have been the most recent representations they have received from the National Gulf War Veterans and Families Association on their proposal to abolish the Pensions Appeal Tribunal as presently constituted for determining war pensions appeals.

Lord Bach (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice): The most recent representation the Government have received from the National Gulf War Veterans and Families Association on their proposal to abolish the Pensions Appeal Tribunal was a letter to my honourable friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Bridget Prentice) of 26 September. Prior to this, a letter dated 26 June was sent by the National Gulf War Veterans and Families Association to Lord Morris of Manchester. A copy of the letter was sent to Ministers in the Ministry of Justice and received on 7 July. My honourable friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Bridget Prentice) met with representatives of the association on 21 July.

November 2008

Tuesday 25th November:

[House of Lords Written Answer – Gulf War Illnesses \(Research Reports\)](#)

Lord Tyler asked Her Majesty's Government:

What implications they anticipate for United Kingdom troops who suffered ill-health caused by service in the 1990—91 Gulf War from the report of the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, mandated by the United States Congress and published on 17 November.

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence) replied: We are now assessing the US report following its publication on 17 November and will review its contents carefully. The needs of Gulf veterans and their families remain a priority for the Government. In line with our cross-government model of support to veterans, healthcare and social support are provided. Financial support is available to veterans and dependants through MoD War Pensions and Armed Forces occupational pension schemes, when appropriate.

[House of Lords Written Answer – Gulf War Illnesses \(Research and Redress\)](#)

Lord Tyler asked Her Majesty's Government:

Whether they will review their policy for research on and redress for United Kingdom Gulf War veterans following the report of the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, mandated by the United States Congress and published on 17 November.

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): We are now assessing the US report following its publication on 17 November and will review its contents carefully. In 2003, the Medical Research Council (MRC) undertook a comprehensive review of relevant Gulf veterans' research, including both UK and overseas studies. The key recommendation of the review was that future studies should focus on improving the long-term health of Gulf veterans with persisting symptoms. The focus of our research effort is, therefore, to identify suitable rehabilitative interventions for those veterans, and a contract has been awarded to a group at Cardiff University, acknowledged experts in this field. Financial support is available to veterans and dependents through MoD War Pensions and the Armed Forces occupational pension schemes.

December 2008

Tuesday 9th December:

[House of Lords Oral Question: Gulf War Illnesses \(Research\)](#)

Lord Morris of Manchester: *To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their response to the implications for British veterans of the findings, published on 17 November, of the Congressionally mandated United States Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War illnesses, identifying neurotoxic exposures and, specifically, pyridostigmine bromide and organophosphates as the foremost causes of these illnesses.*

Lord Morris of Manchester: My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper. In doing so, I declare a non-pecuniary interest, the United States

Congress having co-opted me to serve on its Committee of Inquiry into Gulf War Illnesses, from whose work Federal funding of this research ensued.

Lord Tunnickliffe: My Lords, I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in offering sincere condolences to the family and friends of Lance Corporal David Kenneth Wilson, who was killed while serving on operations in Iraq last week.

The Government are assessing the report following its publication on 17 November and we will review its contents carefully. We note that the US Department of Veterans Affairs has sent the report to the Institute of Medicine for review. In 2003, the Medical Research Council undertook a review of Gulf research, including UK and overseas studies. The key recommendation was that future studies should focus on improving the long-term health of veterans.

Lord Morris of Manchester: My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend. Is he aware that US spending on research into Gulf War illnesses—£269 million—compares with £8 million here, and that these landmark findings show, strongly and consistently that two Gulf War neurotoxic exposures are causally associated with Gulf War illnesses; namely, pyridostigmine bromide and organophosphates, to which virtually all British veterans were exposed?

Again, is he aware, as veterans are, that the RAC's findings have already been discussed to good effect with President-elect Obama's transitional committee, and that the medical press here has been no less swift and supportive in its response?

Thus the *Lancet*, in an editorial last week, unreservedly welcoming the findings, called for, expanded programmes of care, support and compensation as the least that is now owed to those whose ... service to their country turned into lifelong disability? How do we respond to that urgent, humane and highly influential plea?

Lord Tunnickliffe: My Lords, I can respond to two of those points. We believe that approximately £9 million of funding has been spent in the UK. Up to \$300 million has been spent in the US. However, the very report in which the noble Lord was involved casts considerable doubt on that. We share the view of the Department of Veterans Affairs that the report's findings must be carefully reviewed and peer-reviewed. The Department of Veterans Affairs press release states:

"Because VA has traditionally and by law relied upon IOM for independent and credible reviews of the science behind these particular veterans' health issues, Secretary of Veterans Affairs ... has asked IOM to review the advisory committee's report before VA officially responds to the report's conclusions".

The Ministry of Defence intends to consider this long report very carefully before responding in detail to it.

Lord Lloyd of Berwick: My Lords, this massive new report, of which I am sure the noble Lord will have read at least a summary, identifies NAPS tablets, which the veterans were required to take, and organophosphates, with which their tents were sprayed, as being the effective cause of the illness known as Gulf War syndrome. If so, is it not time for the Ministry of Defence to accept full responsibility for the consequences that it has brought about?

Lord Tunnickliffe: My Lords, as I have just said, the Ministry of Defence does not accept any conclusions of the report. I have indeed read the executive summary. The report is a review of published research and, as such, it is entirely proper that it is carefully considered and peer-reviewed first. The noble and learned Lord seems to have gone on to ask whether we should make ex gratia payments to Gulf War veterans. It is absolutely essential that we understand that the system of compensation under the war pensions scheme and Armed Forces occupational pension schemes takes the form of a pension or, if less seriously disabled, a lump sum, for conditions that are found due to service. This is unaffected by any

debate on how these conditions might be labelled. There is no justification for treating Gulf veterans differently from others from other operations who have the same conditions.

Lord Astor of Hever: My Lords, we, too, send our condolences to the family and friends of Lance Corporal David Wilson. Following on from the Minister's response and the review that he mentioned, there appear to be a number of unanswered questions about Gulf War veterans' children. Will the Minister give an undertaking that the review will look into that important issue as well?

Lord Tunncliffe: My Lords, I believe that the original review that was conducted in 2003 called for a review of that, and that work has been done, but I think it is better if I send a copy of that report later.

Lord Addington: My Lords, these Benches wish to be associated with the condolences already expressed. Does the noble Lord agree that it has taken far too long to reach where we are at the moment? Would he care to estimate the total costs, working out what was lost by those affected and what it has cost us in benefits before we have reached this point?

Lord Tunncliffe: My Lords, the Ministry of Defence has already apologised for processes and record-keeping and the way in which some of the early things were affected. The whole issue of where we are now on the science is in my view entirely reasonable. These are slow-to-develop situations, and they are situations where the most careful science must be considered. I reiterate that when it comes to compensation being paid to these individuals, the cases have been properly considered and the compensation is being paid.

The Countess of Mar: My Lords, is the noble Lord aware that as long ago as July 1994, I hypothesised that there was a link between pyridostigmine bromide, the pesticides that were put on to Gulf War veterans' tents and the exposure to chemical nerve gas? Is it not outrageous that it has taken this long—14 years—for any conclusion to be made about Gulf War veterans' illnesses? Does the noble Lord agree that we should now sack the psychobabblers in the Ministry of Defence and rely on proper scientists who do proper research, instead of surmising that the Gulf veterans have invented their own illness?

Lord Tunncliffe: My Lords, I am sorry but I must completely reject the essence of that approach. We are using the best scientists; we are employing people to look at this problem in the most in-depth way. I am satisfied that the Ministry of Defence is discharging its responsibility properly.

Wednesday 17th December:

[Gulf War Illnesses: House of Commons Written Question – 17th December](#)

Lord Morris of Manchester: *To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answers by Baroness Taylor of Bolton on 25 November (WA 284), how much the Medical Research Council spent in total in conducting its review of relevant Gulf War veterans' research, including both United Kingdom and overseas studies; how much of the cost was funded by the Ministry of Defence; and who undertook the review for the council.*

The Minister of State, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (Lord Drayson): In 2003 the Medical Research Council asked the Military Health Research Advisory Group (MHRAG) to undertake a comprehensive review of relevant Gulf research. The review made a number of recommendations on where future research might focus and provided additional advice to the Ministry of Defence.

The MRC met the costs of the 2003 review, which are estimated to have been between £20,000 and £25,000. The main costs were MRC staff time, travel and hotel costs for the non-MRC staff involved, and administration. The Ministry of Defence reimbursed the MRC with approximately £17,000 for the travel and hotel costs.

[House of Lords Written Answer: Gulf War Illnesses \(Scientific Findings and Recommendations\)](#)

Lord Craig of Radley: *To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to respond to the scientific findings and recommendations of the United States Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, published in November 2008; and, if so, when.*

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Taylor of Bolton): We are now assessing carefully the US report following its publication on 17 November. We note that the US Department of Veterans Affairs has sent the report to the Institute of Medicine for review and we will await the outcome of this process before making any comments on the report.

[House of Lords Written Answer: Gulf War Illnesses](#)

Lord Tyler: *To ask Her Majesty's Government how they intend to further their focus on improving the long-term health of Gulf War veterans, following their initial response to the report of the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, mandated by the United States Congress and published on 17 November.*

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they expect to respond in detail to the findings of the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, mandated by the United States Congress and published on 17 November, with particular reference to new policy for research and redress for United Kingdom veterans affected.

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): We are now carefully assessing the US report following its publication on 17 November. We note that the US Department of Veterans Affairs has sent the report to the Institute of Medicine for review and we will await the outcome of this process before making any comments on the report. In 2003 the Medical Research Council (MRC) undertook a comprehensive review of relevant Gulf veterans' research, including both UK and overseas studies. The key recommendation of the review was that future studies should focus on improving the long-term health of Gulf veterans with persisting symptoms. The focus of our research effort is therefore to identify suitable rehabilitative interventions for those veterans and a contract has been awarded to a group at Cardiff University, acknowledged experts in this field. Benefits are available to eligible veterans and dependants through MoD war pension and Armed Forces occupational pension schemes.

January 2009

Tuesday 13th January:

[House of Lords Written Answers: Gulf War Illnesses](#)

The Countess of Mar: *To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Answer by Lord Tunnicliffe on 9 December (Official Report, House of Lords, col. 257), whether the question of poisoning by organophosphates or related compounds was addressed in the 2003 Medical Research Council review of Gulf research; and whether any comparable review has been conducted in the past five years.*

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Taylor of Bolton): In 2003 the Medical Research Council (MRC) asked the Military Health Research Advisory Group (MHRAG) to undertake a comprehensive review of relevant Gulf research. The review made a number of recommendations on where future research might focus and provided additional advice to the Ministry of Defence. Organophosphates were one of the

topics addressed and full details of the findings can be found in the published review. The MRC has not conducted subsequent co-ordinated strategic reviews on research into Gulf Veterans' illnesses.

Exposure to organophosphate pesticides during the 1990-91 Gulf conflict is of concern to some veterans and the Ministry of Defence continues to monitor ongoing research in this area through its membership of the Official Group on Organophosphates, chaired by Defra.

The Countess of Mar: *To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Answer by Lord Tunnicliffe on 9 December (Official Report, House of Lords, col. 258), why it is necessary to review and peer-review the Department of Veterans' Affairs' findings on Gulf War Illness and the Health of Gulf War Veterans when the report contains 68 pages with 1,840 references in peer-reviewed journals.*

The Countess of Mar: *To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Answer by Lord Tunnicliffe on 9 December (Official Report, House of Lords, col. 258), which body will be responsible for the peer-review of the Department of Veterans' Affairs' findings on Gulf War illness and the health of Gulf War veterans; and what will be the expertise of the members of that body.*

The Countess of Mar: *To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Answer by Lord Tunnicliffe on 9 December (Official Report, House of Lords, col. 258), what expert advice the Ministry of Defence has received since the publication of the United States Research Advisory Committee on Gulf Veterans' Illness in November 2008 to substantiate the statement that the Ministry of Defence does not accept any conclusions of the report; and from whom that advice was received.*

The Countess of Mar: *To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Answer by Lord Tunnicliffe on 9 December (Official Report, House of Lords, col. 259), what were the "slow-to-develop situations" to which the Answer referred.*

Baroness Taylor of Bolton: It is standard practice to peer-review all new scientific findings. Although the US Research Advisory Committee report is a review of published research it has come to its own conclusions vis-à-vis this research. The US Department of Veterans Affairs has therefore decided to ask the Institute of Medicine to review the report. Appointment of experts is a matter for the institute. We will await the outcome of this process before making any comments on the report.

Lord Tunnicliffe was referring to the complex medical and scientific issues relating to Gulf veterans' illnesses and the differing scientific views on this matter that are still formulating some 17 years after the end of the 1990-91 Gulf conflict.

The Countess of Mar: *To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will place in the Library of the House of Lords copies of reports that provide evidence that they are monitoring the United States research into Gulf War illnesses.*

Baroness Taylor of Bolton: The Ministry of Defence has asked its liaison officer based in Washington to provide a report on the research undertaken in the US. This will be produced every six months and be made available on the MoD website. The reports will also be sent to the Royal British Legion Gulf War Group.

Thursday 22nd January:

[House of Lords Written Answers: Gulf War \(NAPS Tablets\)](#)

Lord Morris of Manchester: *To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by Lord Bach on 9 October 2003 (WA 67—78), whether the Committee on the Safety of*

Medicines (CSM) was consulted or at any time involved in the decision not to include any restriction on co-administration in the instructions for the use of the nerve agent pre-treatment sets (NAPS) tablets, each containing pyridostigmine bromide, used for troops deployed to the 1990—91 Gulf conflict; and whether they will now ask the CSM's successor, the Commission on Human Medicine, to review that decision further to the findings of the congressionally-mandated United States Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses published on 17 November 2008.

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): Details about the medical countermeasures used to protect British forces against nerve agents during the 1990-91 Gulf conflict were set out in the MoD document *Background to the use of Medical Countermeasures to protect British Forces during the Gulf War (Operation GRANBY)* published in October 1997, which is available in the Library of the House. The document sets out the background to the chemical and biological threats at the time and what the UK Government did to protect British forces. In relation to the use of nerve agent pre-treatment sets (NAPS) tablets and the Committee on Safety of Medicines, it is necessary to research our records on the issue further prior to providing my noble friend with a substantive reply. I will write to my noble friend when I am in a position to do so and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Monday 26th January:

[House of Lords Written Answer: Gulf War \(NAPS Tablets\)](#)

Lord Morris of Manchester: *To ask Her Majesty's Government how many personal medical records of British troops deployed to the 1990—91 Gulf conflict have details of the use and administering of nerve agent pre-treatment sets (NAPS) tablets.*

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Taylor of Bolton): This information is not held centrally. We would need the permission of 1990-91 Gulf veterans before reviewing individual medical records to collate the necessary information (if available) and this could only be provided at disproportionate cost. In October 2001, MoD published the paper *Medical Records in the Gulf*. This paper describes the arrangements for medical record-keeping during the 1990-91 Gulf conflict and discusses a number of reasons why records that were kept may not have been complete. A copy of this paper is available in the Library of the House. The MoD's Vaccines Interactions Research Programme addressed the possible adverse health effects of the combination of vaccines and tablets (NAPS) given to troops to protect them against the threat of biological and chemical warfare. This showed that there would not have been adverse effects on 19 October 2006 (*Official Report*, col. WS 87).

Thursday 29th January:

[House of Commons Written Answer: Gulf War \(Veterans\)](#)

Michael Mates (Conservative, East Hampshire): *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will commission further research into the diagnosis and treatment of Gulf War veterans' illnesses; and if he will make a statement.*

Kevan Jones (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Ministry of Defence): The Medical Research Council (MRC) has provided independent advice on our Gulf research programme. In 2003, the Ministry of Defence asked the MRC to undertake an independent scientific review of all the UK research work that has been carried out into Gulf veterans' illnesses in an international context and to advise on whether there are any areas appropriate for future research. The MRC's recommendations were published on 22 May 2003 and are available at: www.mrc.ac.uk/index.htm.

A key recommendation was that future research work should focus on improving the long-term health of veterans with persistent symptoms and proposals on rehabilitation therapies were sought. A contract for research into ways of rehabilitating unwell Gulf veterans was awarded to an expert group at Cardiff University last summer and work is expected to be complete by April 2012. In the event of any new research proposals being made that would add to our knowledge on Gulf health issues then the Ministry of Defence will consider funding any proposal for research which has been formally considered and approved by the MRC.

Questions Currently Tabled for Written Answer:

House of Lords:

Due for answer 3rd February:

Lord Roberts of Conwy: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Lord Bach on 9 October 2003 (WA 67-78) and Lord Drayson on 17 December 2008 (WA 43), whether the Medical Research Council (MRC) was consulted by Ministers or at any time involved in reviewing the decision not to include any restriction on co-administration in the instructions for use of the nerve agent pre-treatment sets (NAPS) tablets, each containing pyridostigmine bromide, used for troops deployed to the 1990-91 Gulf War conflict; and whether the MRC has been or will be asked to give its comments on the findings of the Congressionally-mandated United States Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, published on 17 November 2008.

Due for answer from 5th February:

Lord Morris of Manchester: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have now made of the findings published on 17 November 2008, of the Congressionally-mandated United States Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses.

Due for answer on or after 6th February:

Lord Morris of Manchester: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Taylor of Bolton on 22 January (WA 221-22), whether they will ask the Commission on Human Medicine to review the decision not to include any restriction on co-administration in the instructions for the use of the nerve agent pre-treatment sets (NAPS) tablets.

Parliamentary Activity this Week:

Thursday 5th February:

11:00: House of Lords Short Debate: Gulf War Illnesses (Lord Morris of Manchester)
