

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051

MINORITY (202) 225-5074

<http://oversight.house.gov>

March 4, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

The Subcommittee on National Security is investigating potential adverse health effects associated with toxic hazards and exposures at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in Uzbekistan.

On January 13, 2020, the Committee wrote to you requesting information on this matter.¹ Unfortunately, the response from the Department of Defense (DOD) has been inadequate. Veterans who deployed to K2 in Operation Enduring Freedom served bravely in defense of the United States, yet many of them have not received answers to their legitimate questions about the potential hazards they may have been exposed to while deployed there.

On February 27, 2020, the Subcommittee on National Security held a hearing to receive testimony from U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant Paul Widener, Jr. (ret.) and U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Scott Welsch (ret.), two veterans who previously deployed to K2 and have each suffered from cancer. The Subcommittee also heard testimony from Ms. Kim Brooks, the wife of U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Timothy Brooks, who believes the contaminants her husband was exposed to at K2 contributed to his cancer diagnosis and death in 2004.

During the hearing, Mr. Widener testified that he is aware of 400 veterans who have been diagnosed with cancer since they were deployed to K2 and are seeking information from DOD and restitution from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

Our nation's bravest warriors are sick and dying from their service at K2. ... There are K2 veterans who will not see 2021 from this side of the grave. We beg for you to right this injustice.²

¹ Letter from Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, and Chairman Stephen F. Lynch, Subcommittee on National Security, to Secretary Mark T. Esper, Department of Defense (Jan. 13, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/news/press-releases/oversight-committee-seeks-information-related-to-hazardous-conditions-at>).

² Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Testimony of Paul B. Widener, *Karshi-Khanabad: Hazardous Exposures and Effects on U.S. Servicemembers* (Feb. 27, 2020) (online at

Mr. Welsch also testified:

K2 veterans deserve to know what we were exposed to so that along with our doctors, we can take steps to preserve our health as best as 7,000 service members exposed to dozens of toxins and radioactive materials can.³

Because LTC Brooks passed away while on active duty, Ms. Brooks and her family received VA Disability and Indemnity Compensation, as well as Social Security benefits and military healthcare that enabled her to support her family. However, Ms. Brooks testified:

It has been over 15 years since we lost Tim, but it is newly devastating to learn that there are so many other veterans, spouses, parents, and children going through the same pain and loss that my family did *without* the support of their government, simply because these veterans had the “bad luck” to get sick after they left service.⁴

Despite the growing body of evidence about the potential adverse health effects U.S. servicemembers and veterans are experiencing following their service at K2, DOD does not appear to be treating this matter with the urgency it deserves.

On January 29, 2020, DOD advised that staff is “diligently” researching the matter, yet would not be able to produce the requested documents until April 30, 2020, more than three months after our requested response date.⁵ Sadly, that delay will keep K2 veterans, including those suffering from cancer, waiting for answers. It is vital the U.S. Government provide answers to these veterans as soon and as expeditiously as possible.

As you know, the VA continues to deny that the hazardous materials exposures at K2 are causing adverse health effects in former U.S. servicemembers. Any relevant documents in DOD’s possession will be critical to our investigation and informing whether certain health outcomes should be associated with deployment to K2. Time is of the essence, as many of these veterans are battling advanced-stage cancers and are seeking answers from their government.

For all of the above reasons, we request that you provide the documents and communications requested in our January 13, 2020, letter by March 20, 2020.

<https://oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings/karshi-khanabad-hazardous-exposures-and-effects-on-us-servicemembers>).

³ Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Testimony of Scott W. Welsch, *Karshi-Khanabad: Hazardous Exposures and Effects on U.S. Servicemembers* (Feb. 27, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings/karshi-khanabad-hazardous-exposures-and-effects-on-us-servicemembers>).

⁴ Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Testimony of Kim E. Brooks, *Karshi-Khanabad: Hazardous Exposures and Effects on U.S. Servicemembers* (Feb. 27, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings/karshi-khanabad-hazardous-exposures-and-effects-on-us-servicemembers>).

⁵ Letter from Dr. Terry M. Rauch, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, to Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, and Chairman Stephen F. Lynch, Subcommittee on National Security (Jan. 29, 2020).

In addition, please provide an unclassified roster of U.S. servicemembers who deployed to K2 between October 1, 2001, and December 31, 2005, by Friday, March 13, 2020. This roster should include the servicemember's name, their dates of service, and their last known permanent address and telephone number.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5051.

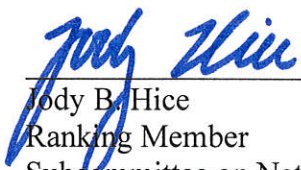
Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



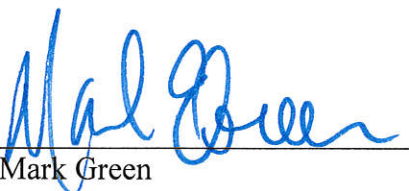
Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security



Jody B. Hice
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security



Mark Meadows
Member of Congress
Subcommittee on National Security



Mark Green
Member of Congress
Subcommittee on National Security