



News Release

BYRON L. DORGAN
CHAIRMAN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday
January 27, 2009

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
DORGAN: Barry Piatt – 202-224-0577
CASEY: Kendra Barkoff – 202-228-6367

**After news reports that soldier's electrocution
death reclassified from "accidental" to "negligent homicide"**

SENATORS DEMAND ANSWERS FROM DOD ABOUT ELECTROCUTIONS OF SOLDIERS, WANT DEFENSE SECRETARY TO MEET WITH THEM AND MOTHER OF ELECTROCUTED SOLDIER ON CONTRACTOR ACCOUNTABILITY

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) --- Two U.S. Senators today are requesting a meeting with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and the mother of a U.S. soldier who has been informed by an Army investigator that her son's death by electrocution at his base in Baghdad has been re-classified by the Army from "accidental" to "negligent homicide" by contractor KBR and two of its supervisors.

U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) chaired a July 11, 2008, Senate Democratic Policy Committee hearing that looked into the death of Staff Sgt. Ryan Maseth and 12 other U.S. soldiers electrocuted on Army bases in Iraq. Following the hearing, Dorgan and Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) requested that the Pentagon conduct a theatre-wide investigation into KBR's work on electrical installations in Iraq. In response, the Army conducted a review of the matter and, while asking KBR to improve its performance, continued to rely on KBR to inspect much of its own work and has not imposed any penalties on the company.

In response, the Army agreed to conduct a thorough investigation into the matter, but then decided to use KBR to perform much of the review.

Testimony at Dorgan's hearing last July by former KBR employees disclosed that KBR hired unqualified third country nationals to do electrical wiring at U.S. military bases in Iraq.

-- more --

Given the latest development, including possible negligent homicide charges against the contractor, Senators Dorgan and Casey have asked Defense Secretary Gates to meet with them and Maseth's mother, Cheryl Harris, to discuss the process that the Department of Defense intends to follow to guarantee full accountability for any contractor misconduct that relates to the electrocutions of U.S. troops in Iraq.

Dorgan noted the Army originally told Harris her son was electrocuted because he carried an electrical appliance into the shower. The Army later retreated from that account, saying Staff Sgt. Maseth was electrocuted by wires hanging above the shower, an account that was also inaccurate.

"I believe DOD has been less than truthful to the families of soldiers who were electrocuted at military bases in Iraq because of shoddy contract work. It's time for some straight talk about accountability," Dorgan said.

"Those who receive contracts to serve our soldiers have an obligation to do so responsibly," Dorgan said. "We want to know what Secretary Gates intends to do to ensure that contractors are acting responsibly, particularly in light of the Army's reported finding that KBR and its supervisors may have been criminally negligent. We also want to know why the DOD has not pursued a process to debar contractors who are fleecing our taxpayers and putting soldiers at risk."

"The news Cheryl Harris received from an Army CID that her son Ryan Maseth's death has changed classification from 'accidental' to 'negligent homicide' and singles out not just two KBR employees, but the company itself, for potential criminal liability is a significant development," said Senator Bob Casey. "This revelation validates the perseverance of Cheryl Harris, Ryan's mother, in seeking all the facts behind Ryan's death. We must not only ensure that full accountability is served in this case, but that the Pentagon is also doing all that it can to prevent future electrocutions of American personnel in both Iraq and Afghanistan. We must put an end to our troops continuing to get put in harms way when they are doing something so simple as taking a shower."

As Chairman of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, Dorgan has chaired 18 oversight hearings on contracting abuses and corruption in Iraq and Afghanistan. The hearings exposed billions of dollars in wasteful spending and numerous accounts of U.S. soldiers, already serving in harm's way, being put at grave risk due to shoddy work by contractors, and by unsafe water supplies provided by our troops by contractors who failed to do their jobs.

-- END --