

Opening Statement
Senator Byron L. Dorgan
Chairman, Democratic Policy Committee

**“Contractor Misconduct and the
Electrocution Deaths of American Soldiers in Iraq”**

Friday, July 11, 2008
226 Dirksen Senate Office Building

This is the seventeenth in a series of oversight hearings conducted by the Democratic Policy Committee to examine contracting fraud, waste, and abuse in Iraq.

Over the last five years, our country has asked tens of thousands of young men and women in uniform to go into harm’s way in Iraq and Afghanistan. While these soldiers have answered the call to serve our country on the battlefield, they never expected that their lives might be endangered by the air they breathe, the food they eat, the water they use to brush their teeth, or the showers they step into.

Yet as we have documented in past hearings, and will explore further today, there have been massive failures by contractors, which combined with a lack of oversight by the Pentagon, have presented unexpected and unnecessary hazards to our troops.

Many of these problems have involved Kellogg, Brown, and Root (KBR), which until recently was a subsidiary of Halliburton. KBR was awarded a multi-billion dollar sole-source contract to provide logistical support to our troops. And the testimony we have heard about their performance has been almost unbelievable.

We have heard testimony from KBR workers about how the company exposed U.S. troops, British troops, its own workers and Iraqis at the Qarmat Ali water injection plant in Iraq to a highly toxic chemical called sodium dichromate. This was the same toxic chemical that was the subject of a case profiled in the movie Erin Brockovich, and which can result in cancer and other deadly diseases. Despite the fact that internal KBR memos documented the fact that this chemical exposure was very serious, the company is in court trying to avoid any responsibility at all for the injury it has caused.

We have heard testimony from a KBR food supervisor, who described how the company would insist on serving food to the troops that had exceeded its expiration date. In one instance, a convoy of food supplies was shot up by

enemy fire. KBR managers directed that the shrapnel be removed from the food, and the food be served to unsuspecting troops anyway. When the KBR food supervisor objected to these practices, he was sent to the heavy-fighting area of Fallujah in retaliation.

We have heard testimony from KBR water treatment workers, who testified that KBR was improperly treating water that our troops would use to shower, brush their teeth, and make coffee. That water in some cases was twice as contaminated as raw water from the Euphrates river.

KBR denied that there was a problem with water, and the Army denied that there was a problem. Then we got a copy of an internal KBR report from the company's water quality manager for all of Iraq, warning that the water problems could have caused "mass sickness or death." We also received an e-mail from an Army doctor – a captain – who had documented many illnesses related to contaminated water, and had traced the problem to KBR-supplied water.

Despite this, the Army sent two-star Brigadier General Jerome Johnson to the Armed Services Committee in April of last year, and he denied flatly that there was any problem with the water at all.

In March, the Inspector General at the Defense Department issued a report confirming that there had been widespread problems with water in Iraq, that KBR was largely responsible, and that IG had notified the Army of that fact before General Johnson denied that there were any water problems at all.

I've asked Secretary Gates to look into whether General Johnson provided false and misleading testimony to Congress, and he has directed that an investigation be conducted.

Through all these and many other problems, the Pentagon has sought to protect KBR at all costs. On Wednesday of this week, we heard the testimony of Charles Smith, who managed the Defense Department's LOGCAP contract with KBR, which is the largest Pentagon contract in Iraq. Mr. Smith was removed from his position for insisting that the Pentagon withhold payment to KBR for over \$1 billion in questionable charges. The man who fired him was General Johnson, the same officer who denied to Congress that KBR had improperly treated water for the troops.

Today, we will hear about KBR's tragic failure to correct faulty electrical work at U.S. military installations in Iraq, even after the United States Army issued a bulletin stating that improper wiring by contractors had resulted in the electrocution deaths of several soldiers.

I should note that earlier this week, the American commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, stated that at least 13 Americans had been electrocuted in Iraq since the war began, and that many more soldiers have received painful shocks.

Cheryl Harris lost her son, Staff Sgt. Ryan Maseth, a Green Beret, when he was electrocuted in a shower at the Radwaniyah Palace Complex in Baghdad on January 2, 2008.

Lorraine McGee lost her son, Staff Sgt. Christopher Everett, when he was electrocuted while power washing a Humvee on September 7, 2005 in Al Taqqadum, Iraq.

Rachel McNeill was stationed at Camp Speicher in Iraq, where improperly wired water heaters shocked members of her Army battalion in 2005 when they showered.

Debbie Crawford worked for KBR in Baghdad from July 2004 to July 2006 as both an electrician and a safety representative.

Jefferey Bliss worked for KBR as a field combat electrician in Afghanistan in 2005 and 2006.

I thank the witnesses who have travelled to be with us today, in some cases at great inconvenience to them and to recount very painful stories of personal loss. I look forward to their testimony.