

Assertions on Iraq weaponry in Gulf War scorned



NATIONAL

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pentagon assertions that Iraq did not use chemical or biological weapons during the Gulf War met with congressional ridicule and veterans' anger at a Senate hearing Wednesday.

"We've got two different worlds here, two different realities," said Sen. Donald Riegle, D-Mich. "It's extremely troubling."

In a sometimes hostile exchange in the Senate Banking Committee he chairs, Riegle accused Pentagon officials of ignoring countless signs that U.S. troops were exposed to chemical contaminants.

Riegle said this "remarkable blind spot" meant that thousands of veterans who returned from the war with mysterious, debilitating illnesses have not received adequate treatment.

"There's an enormous institutional difficulty in ever coming to terms with some grievous decision errors," Riegle said.

The hearing room was filled with veterans and their supporters who cheered Riegle and at times made derisive remarks about the responses of Undersecretary of Defense Edwin Dorn.

"This administration is committed to treating you fairly," Dorn said, addressing the veterans. He denied any

Pentagon attempt at a coverup, saying that no one he worked with "has any other mission but to get to the truth."

Dorn said that while there was some concern that low-level chemical agents were present in the war theater, "we have concluded that Iraq did not use chemical or biological weapons during the war."

Dorn insisted that the government was exploring every plausible factor that could be behind the illnesses that have come to be known as Persian Gulf Syndrome, including the possibility of exposure to chemical agents.

Riegle used the hearing to release a 160-page report that chronicled more than a dozen incidents where American troops described explosions, presumably from Scud missiles, followed by the sounding of chemical agent detector alarms and burning or numbing sensations on their faces and skin.

Dr. Theodore Prociv, deputy assistant to the secretary of defense for chemical and biological matters, said he did not believe that any chemical agents entered the theater. He said the alarms that went off thousands of times during the war were either set off deliberately or resulted from faulty data.

That assertion was met with incredulity. "I don't think there's a lot of credibility unless you have an answer" to every alarm that went off, said Sen. Robert Bennett, R-Utah.

"It's an embarrassing assertion; it's so incredible and unbelievable," Riegle said.

As Riegle left the hearing for a vote on the Senate floor, he invited veterans in the audience to address their complaints to Dorn. The Pentagon official was surrounded by people complaining of their treatment by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"This is my quality health care," said Dean Lundholm, Jr., waving a bottle of Maalox. Lundholm, a member of the National Guard in Alameda, Calif., said he has suffered from breathing difficulties, joint pain, muscle spasms and open sores since returning from service in the Gulf. "I'm on food stamps and they say they're doing all they can do."

"It's exactly the same as what the Vietnam vets heard 20 years ago," David Kaufman of the National Vietnam Veterans Coalition told Dorn. "The bottom line is that thousands of Vietnam vets have died" from the defoliant Agent Orange, Kaufman said. "And thousands of Persian Gulf veterans may die."

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., also warned the Pentagon of repeating the mistake of the Agent Orange experience, when for years it refused to acknowledge that the chemical had sickened vets. "The pain of learning of the coverup only adds to the agony of the original sin," she said.

Alaskan oil export ban may be lifted

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Clinton administration is considering asking Congress to lift the export ban on petroleum from Alaska's North Slope, opening a new market for Alaskan crude in Asia, officials said Wednesday.

Such a move, which would require congressional approval, would be likely to prompt strong criticism from environmentalists, the U.S. maritime industry and consumer advocates who maintain it will increase West Coast gasoline prices.

Administration officials, asking not to be identified, said the subject of lifting the export ban on North Slope oil has caused lively debate within the administration, and the Energy Department has generally argued for an end to the export ban.

Deputy Energy Secretary Bill White, in remarks this week to a group of independent petroleum producers in California, suggested that lifting the ban would

give a boost to California producers, mean thousands of new jobs in both California and Alaska, and have little effect on West Coast gasoline prices.

A department spokesman, however, insisted that no decision has been made on whether to urge an end to the export ban. "We are preparing a study on the economic gains and losses of lifting the ban," said DOE spokesman Joe Lucas.

Congress in approving the construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline in the 1970s specifically required that Alaska oil must be sold in the United States to ease the country's reliance on foreign oil.

Environmentalists have argued in favor of the ban, fearing that exports would speed up the depletion of North Slope reserves and increase pressure to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, also in the far northern part of the state.

Consumer groups such as Citizen Action claim exports will benefit the North Slope oil companies, but result in higher gasoline prices, especially along the West Coast, where much of the Alaska oil is refined.

Among the North Slope producers, British Petroleum Co. has pressed for an end to the export ban.

The maritime industry has fought past attempts in Congress to lift the ban, arguing that shippers would be likely to use foreign tankers to transport oil across the Pacific, rather than the smaller U.S. vessels used to ship oil along the West Coast and through the Panama Canal to Gulf Coast refineries.

Howard Marlowe, director of the Coalition to Keep Alaska Oil, said Wednesday that claims by some administration officials that Alaska oil exports could produce as many as 15,000 new jobs were "totally unsubstantiated."

Hanging set 12 years after crime for triple murderer

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — A triple murderer whose crimes inspired new state laws protecting victims and witnesses lost a bid for mercy Wednesday, less than two days before his scheduled hanging.

Charles Rodman Campbell, 39, scheduled to die early Friday for the revenge killings of two women and a girl 12 years ago, still had other legal moves pending.

The state Clemency and Pardons Board voted 4-0, with one abstention, against recommending to Gov. Mike Lowry that Campbell's death sentence be commuted to life in prison.

"It's time to return the burden squarely to Mr. Campbell's shoulders," board chairwoman Anita Peterson said.

Campbell was sentenced to death for the April 1982 slayings of Renae Wicklund, 31; her 8-year-old daughter, Shannah; and family friend Barbara Hendrickson, 51, near Clearview in Snohomish County, north of Seattle.

Campbell had raped Wicklund in 1974 and her testimony and that of Hendrickson put him behind bars. Campbell was on work release from a state prison when he bludgeoned and slashed the throats of his three victims, nearly beheading the child.

Among new laws passed since Campbell's conviction are statutes granting violent-crime victims the right to be notified when their attackers are released and requiring that victims and witnesses be told the outcome of cases.

Ed Fleisher, the governor's attorney, said Lowry was expected to respond by

Thursday to the recommendation. Lowry has said he questions any state's ability to fairly administer the death penalty, but considers Washington's law to be a good one.

Campbell also had an appeal pending before the U.S. Supreme Court, which refused to hear two previous appeals, and one filed this week before the state Supreme Court.

Snohomish Superior Court, where Campbell was convicted, rejected motions Wednesday seeking to vacate the execution date. A new filing was expected in U.S. District Court in Seattle.

The cruelty of the killings and drawn-out legal appeals combined to create an unusual malice toward Campbell.

"There is another reason for the strong feelings toward Campbell, and the reason is Campbell," said Rick Bart, the sheriff's detective who investigated the murders.

"It's his attitude. It is the way he has come off to the public — so completely uncaring. It's like he looks at the world and asks, 'Hey, why are you guys mad at me?'"

Eric Lind, who prosecuted Campbell, said even Campbell's mother — who has since died — gave up on her son.

"She basically said death might be the best thing for him. It wasn't that she hated him. It was that she tried everything. It was a recognition of his evilness," said Lind, now in private practice.

Campbell would be the second inmate executed in Washington since 1963. Westley Allan Dodd was hanged in January 1993.

Abortion opponents take opinion to Clinton

WASHINGTON (AP) — Abortion opponents delivered their message to the White House in person and by phone Wednesday as President Clinton prepared to sign legislation prohibiting protesters from limiting access to abortion clinics.

After three warnings, U.S. Park Police arrested seven Operation Rescue demonstrators who refused to leave the Pennsylvania Avenue sidewalk outside the White House.

And hundreds of callers continued to dial phone lines to White House offices as they have for a week. Many of the calls were automatically transferred to the White House comment line, which registers opinions on abortion and many other issues.

"Beginning late last week there was an increase in calls coming into the White House with people calling in their positions on the clinic-access bill," said Deputy White House Press Secretary Ginnie Terzano.

"But it's tapered off a lot since last Friday," she said.

Clinton is scheduled to sign the clinic-access bill at a White House ceremony midday Thursday.

Several of those arrested shouted anti-abortion slogans as they were handcuffed and led to a wait-

ing police van.

The legislation forbids demonstrators from blockading access to clinics, resorting to violence and damaging property.

Abortion-rights activists campaigned for the bill in response to more than 1,000 violent incidents at abortion clinics since 1977.

Opponents of the measure said it destroys the constitutional right of free speech.

But supporters said it was intended only to protect the people who visit and work in abortion clinics.

They noted that in the last 17 years there have been 36 bombings, 81 cases of arson, 84 assaults, two kidnappings, 131 death threats and one murder, the killing of Dr. David Gunn, who performed abortions in Florida.

Under the legislation, persons found guilty of violence at abortion clinics could face up to a year in prison and a \$100,000 fine for the first conviction and up to three years and \$250,000 in fines for subsequent offenses.

Nonviolent offenders could receive six-month jail sentences and a \$10,000 fine for a first conviction and up to 18 months and \$25,000 for later offenses.

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 For more information, please call 346-4387.