

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FEDERAL AND STATE AFFAIRS.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Bill Mason at 1:30 p.m. on February 17, 2003 in Room 313-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Representative Tom Burroughs - E

Committee staff present: Russell Mills, Legislative Research Department
Mary Torrence, Office of Revisor of Statutes
Rose Marie Glatt, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Representative Dan Thimesch
Jim Bunker, Veterans Information Network
Dr. Irving Cohen M.D., M.P.H.

Others attending: See Attached

Without objection a bill was introduced by Representative Gilbert regarding the Kansas Commemorative coin design act.

On the February 5th minutes, second page, **HB 2240** was changed to **HB 2040**. Representative Cox moved that the February 5th minutes, with the above revision, February 10th and 12th be approved. It was seconded by Representative Peterson. The motion carried.

HB 2228 - Persian Gulf War Veterans Health Initiative Board renamed Kansas Veterans Health Commission, separate agency within Executive Branch. The Bill has no fiscal effect on FY 2003/4 budgets.

Representative Thimesch presented **HB 2228** (Attachment 1). The bill would establish a separate state agency to be known as the Kansas Veterans Health Commission. The advisory board had several studies that confirmed Persian Gulf War Veterans returned home and developed illnesses. There is need for more research in order to understand these illnesses and exposures to bring about better treatment.

Representative Thimesch referred to two letters that had been sent to President Bush expressing concern over the mistakes made during the Gulf War (Attachment 2). He questioned whether the President can give complete assurance that our troops will be safe if and when Iraq uses its chemical and biological weapons on them. Has the government corrected the mistakes made in the first Gulf War. At this date he had not received a reply. His testimony included a *Wichita Eagle* newspaper article, dated February 28, 2002, regarding medical preparedness in case of war (Attachment 3).

He called attention to page 8 of the bill, stating that they would support an amendment that would eliminate the language on lines 18-23 , regarding public service announcements, as it was more than the intent or proposal of the advisory board.

In response to a question regarding the fiscal note, Representative Thimesch said the intent of the

HB 2228 was that funding would come from various funding sources, i.e., grants, fund-raisers, private donations, etc., so it is not dependent on SGF money. The Chairman reviewed the fiscal note that reflected an annual cost of \$140,000. It was agreed that further checking would be done to gain assurance that the fiscal impact reflects the intent of the bill. Discussions followed clarifying the bill.

James A. Bunker, Chairman, Kansas Persian Gulf War Health Initiative Advisory Board, spoke in support of **HB 2228** ([Attachment 4](#)). He spoke about the lack of help from the federal government for veterans that return home and become ill. The Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs helps veterans however it does not conduct research to determine causes. It is through research projects like those done in Kansas that new information is being gained, making new treatments a possibility. Included in his testimony was correspondence related to requests for federal funding ([Attachment 5](#)).

Doctor Irv Cohen, appeared in support of **HB 2228** ([Attachment 6](#)). As a retired physician from the Topeka Veterans Hospital he had first hand knowledge of the neurologic and muscular disorders that many gulf war veterans experienced and determined that those veterans had all been exposed to two things: the anti-nerve gas pill and high levels of insecticides. This was confirmed by various studies in the industry. He explained four reasons to support the bill.

- Kansas Veterans need help. The initial research done by Dr. Lea Steele should continue in order to maintain a program that continues to monitor veterans.
- Kansans have the talent and the ability to help. Through her research, Dr. Steele worked with colleagues from both major universities and other talented Kansans.
- Kansas should not pass up the funding of research that will help Kansas. This bill asks for no money but opens the possibility of Kansas receiving significant Federal research dollars.
- Future veterans would face new problems. The best talent that Kansas can offer needs to be utilized to assist those veterans returning from war.

Representative Thimesch summarized by stating that the bill would maintain a war registry of veterans from the existing database. This would provide data for an impact study to determine how the children of veterans are affected. There would also be public service announcements to make veterans aware of the importance of being included in the VA war registry.

The hearing on **HB 2228** was closed. The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m. with the next meeting scheduled for February 18, at 1:30 p.m. in room 313-S.

CONTINUATION SHEET