

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6:48 p.m. on November 7 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on November 8.

Statement on the Special Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

November 8, 1997

Our administration has made it a priority to care for and compensate Gulf war veterans who have fallen ill. The First Lady and I were both troubled by the pain and frustration these veterans felt. We have been determined to find out why they are sick, to make public the facts as we learned them, and to apply the lessons of the Gulf war for the future. In May 1995, I asked some of America's best doctors and scientists, as well as Gulf war veterans, to undertake an independent and open review of the Government's response to our veterans' health care concerns. Now, the Presidential Advisory Committee I established has delivered its special report. I thank its Chairman, Dr. Joyce Lashof, and the other members for their outstanding work and for extending their efforts 10 months beyond their original mandate. Based on their recommendations, I am taking the following actions:

First, to better care for and compensate our veterans, we will work to establish a new benefits system that will ensure that Gulf war veterans receive treatment and compensation for all illnesses linked to service in the Gulf even if we cannot identify the direct cause. We will ask the National Academy of Sciences to review the ongoing scientific research regarding the connections between all reported illnesses and Gulf war service so we have the fullest understanding of the health consequences of that service. In addition, we will work with Congress on legislation to guarantee that this system of benefits is maintained in all administrations to come.

Second, to deepen our understanding of why Gulf war veterans might have gotten sick, we will dedicate \$13.2 million for new research on low-level exposure to chemical agents and other possible causes of illness.

Third, to make sure our veterans and the public know all the facts and have full confidence in DOD's fact finders, former Senator Warren Rudman has agreed to lead an oversight board to ensure that the Defense Department's ongoing investigations into events in the Gulf meet the highest standards.

Fourth, to apply the lessons we have learned for the future, I am directing the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to create a new force health protection program. Every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine will have a comprehensive, lifelong medical record of all illnesses and injuries they suffer, the care and inoculations they receive, and their exposure to different hazards. These records will help us prevent illness and identify and cure those that occur.

From the beginning, I vowed that we would not rest until we uncovered all the facts about Gulf war illnesses and used that knowledge to improve the health of our veterans, their families, and all who serve our Nation, now and in the future. As Veterans Day approaches, we are continuing work to fulfill that pledge. The men and women of our Armed Forces put everything on the line for us. I am determined that we show the same resolve for them.