

Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

Friday, July 11, 2008
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
226 Dirksen Senate Office Building

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

Hearing Transcript

SEN. DORGAN: This morning, this is a hearing of the Democratic Policy Committee and this is the 17th in a series of hearings we have held over nearly four years on the subject of oversight with respect to contracting in Iraq.

I'm joined by my colleague, Senator Casey. We will be joined by other Senators, as well, this morning. But in the interest of time, we want to begin now.

For the last five years, our country has asked tens of thousands of men and women to go to Iraq and put themselves in harm's way in both Iraq and in Afghanistan, and soldiers answered their call to serve our country and do so today.

They get up in the morning in those areas of Iraq and Afghanistan and they put on their body armor and they risk their lives during the day, because their country asked them to.

And they never expect, however, that their lives might be in danger for reasons other than enemy combatants.

We have learned in hearings that we have held that there have been some practices by contracting firms and lack of oversight by the Pentagon and, also, I might say, the Congress that have endangered, I believe, those who have served.

And they deserve a Congress and a Pentagon that is aggressive with respect to these subjects. We have never, in the history of this country, hired so many contractors to do so much of the work in wartime that has previously been done by American soldiers.

We've documented in past hearings and will explore today the failure by contractors, which represents unnecessary risks and, in some cases, tragic consequences for soldiers and, also, in some cases, for those who work for the contractors.

I want to say that it gives me no pleasure ever to have hearings about failure. There are a lot of successes. There are stories of heroism and gallantry. There are a lot of reasons to be feeling blessed about being in this country and representing this country and being a part of the citizenry of this great country.

But part of that blessing is also a responsibility that accrues to all of us to make certain that our country is on track, doing the right things.

With respect to the Iraq war, it has been controversial, no question about that, but it is also the case that we have literally shoveled money out the door, almost from the back of pickup trucks, pallets of \$100 bills wrapped in plastic being shipped to the country of Iraq.

We've had hearings in which people have come to testify and said, "We told contractors 'bring a bag' because we pay in cash."

We've had contract whistleblowers come to our hearing and hold up photographs of themselves standing in front of \$2 million wrapped in saran wrap. And, again, the basement of a building in downtown Baghdad, the message from them to contractors was "bring a sack because we pay cash."

They said it was just like the Wild West.

I've held hearings about waste, fraud and abuse, and that's not Republican or Democrat. It's just something that undermines the American taxpayer.

I've also held hearings, however, about more serious failures and those are failures by, in the most part, contractors and, some parts, failures of the Pentagon, dealing with water quality to our troops.

We held a hearing in which we had whistleblowers say, "We want the country to know a problem that exists and has not been corrected," and described to us water quality that's being provided for non-potable water in Iraq that is twice as contaminated as raw water from the Euphrates River, because of a contractor mistake.

The contractor denied it, despite the fact that the person who was responsible for it on behalf of the contractor wrote a 21-page memorandum that said, "This was a near miss, could have caused mass sickness or death."

At a table, witnesses told of us it. The contractor denied it and the Pentagon denied it.

Even as I was holding the hearing, a young woman from Iraq, an Army physician at an Army camp in Iraq, sent an unsolicited e-mail just out of the blue and said, "Senator Dorgan, I read about this hearing you held yesterday and," she said, "I want you to know I'm a physician, serving in the U.S. Army, at a camp here in Iraq, and exactly what you heard at the hearing is happening at my camp and I know that because I sent my lieutenant out to track the water lines to find out where they went and where they were servicing, and we have non-potable water that is contaminated."

And she said, "I've been treating soldiers who have come to me with the maladies that

come from non-potable water that is contaminated.”

It’s just one example. One of the hearings that we held recently was the issue of sodium dichromate, a deadly chemical that was used at one of the sites, exposing contract employees and also exposing soldiers without their knowledge.

And the hearing described the fact that the contractor knew it, but the contractor fired a couple of employees who complained who knew the consequences before it was finally stopped.

Questions about exposure of troops and contracting employees to harm and ignoring warnings, those are very serious questions.

Today, we will hear about a contractor that was responsible to correct faulty electrical work at U.S. military installations in Iraq, even after the United States Army, in 2004, issued a bulletin stating that improper wiring by contractors had resulted in the electrocution death of a number of soldiers.

Even after the warning, we discover that shoddy contractors’ work, inadequate inspections resulted in further deaths by electrocution.

Earlier this week, the American commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, stated that at least 13 Americans, 11 of them soldiers, had been electrocuted in Iraq since the war began and that more soldiers have received very painful shocks.

Cheryl Harris is with us today. She lost her son, Staff Sergeant Ryan Maseth, a Green Beret. He was electrocuted in the shower at a complex in Baghdad on January 2, 2008.

Lorraine McGee is with us today, as well. She lost her son, Staff Sergeant Christopher Everett, when he was electrocuted while power-washing a Humvee on September 7, 2005 in Iraq.

Rachel McNeill was stationed at a camp in Iraq, where improperly wired water heaters shocked members of her Army battalion in 2004 and 2005, when they showered at that camp.

Debbie Crawford worked for Kellogg, Brown and Root in Baghdad from July 2004 to July 2006, both as an electrician and a safety representative, and is with us here today to testify.

Jefferey Bliss worked for Kellogg, Brown and Root as a field combat electrician in Afghanistan in 2005 and 2006.

These are people who have traveled some substantial distances, in many cases, to be with us today.

It is not easy to speak publicly about these issues, but it seems to me that shining a spotlight on the same spot to talk about what is wrong and how to fix it, to try to understand who's accountable, who's responsible.

That is a very important matter, for otherwise, we will find more citizens who will come to tables like these with pictures of their loved ones who lost their lives needlessly.

I invited, in this case, Halliburton, Kellogg, Brown and Root, to be present at this hearing, if they chose.

I want to say, as I've said at previous hearings, because I've held 17 of these hearings, I don't use these hearings and would never use these hearings to shine a light on one company to say I don't like this company. That's not my point.

There are many companies that have been the subject of these hearings, Custer Battles, Parsons, a whole series of companies who have been contracting with the federal government with respect to these wars.

But it seems to me that the largest contracts by far, the bulk of the contracts have gone to Halliburton and its subsidiary, former subsidiary, now Kellogg, Brown and Root, and it also seems to me that very, very serious questions have resulted in allegations about improper contracting.

And my sense is that we don't have a choice but to try to figure out what's going on. We read about it in the paper and then it's, "Well, it's under investigation," but you never hear about it again.

I can tell you about four or five things that are being investigated have been investigated for four or five years, you never hear a word about it, not a word.

There's a young woman named Bunnatine Greenhouse walking the halls of the Pentagon right now. She testified publicly. She said the awarding of these contracts was the greatest abuse of contracting authority she had seen in her entire career.

You know what she paid for saying that out loud? She paid for it with her career, because she was demoted almost immediately.

And call the Pentagon today and ask what's going on with Bunnatine Greenhouse and the investigation, they'll say, "Well, we can't comment. It's still under investigation."

The fact is we don't have a choice but to try to understand what on earth is happening and make sure it doesn't happen again and especially in cases where, tragically, soldiers and others are losing lives to just some fundamental mistakes by contractors and lack of oversight by the Pentagon.

We have a responsibility to make certain that we understand what's going on and to

correct it and to make sure it doesn't happen again and make sure there's accountability for it.

Well, the purpose of this hearing is to receive information on the subject I've just described, the electrocution, the tragic electrocution of some soldiers and contractors in Iraq.

It is a difficult subject, difficult for witnesses to come and speak publicly about, but God bless them for being citizens who care enough to speak out and to say this shouldn't have happened and let's make sure it doesn't happen again and have some other family receive that kind of a telephone call.

In the search for accountability, I think we improve our government and improve all that we do.

I'm pleased that Senator Casey is with us today.

I called this hearing, in part, because Senator Casey has done a substantial amount of work on this very subject, the subject of electrocution of soldiers, the electrocution that is happening at some Army camps, and his work has been very instrumental in trying to help us understand more about what is happening.

Senator Casey, let me call on you for an opening statement and then we will begin. I'm going to call on someone from the U.S. House to introduce one of our witnesses, and then we will hear from the witnesses.

Senator Casey?

SEN. CASEY: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much and thank you for your leadership on this issue today, the issues we'll discuss today and receive testimony about, but also on the larger issue of accountability as it pertains to the war.

Senator Dorgan just reviewed a number of matters that have been taken up by this committee under his leadership, and we're grateful for that, not just as those who are involved in government, but as citizens, because the accountability we talk about today is central to what we do.

I wanted to, first of all, express gratitude to the witnesses who are here who come to us today under the most difficult of circumstances, some having the pressure of making public -- providing public testimony under extraordinary pressure, and others, and I'm thinking of Lorraine and Cheryl, who are providing testimony, but testimony weighted down by the grief that you feel in your own hearts and in your own families.

And it's hard to adequately express that kind of gratitude. I guess that one thing we do today, in addition to hearing testimony, is to do our best to pray, as well, to pray for you and for your families that somehow we can, in our own way, wish for a prayer from the --

I'm thinking of the beatitudes, where it says "Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted."

And we hope today is part of the comfort that we pray that the Lord will bestow upon you.

We also are remarkably impressed today that even in your grief, you've been able to rise above that and to use your own witness, to use your own tragic story to make sure that other families don't suffer this way.

And I know that in my conversations with Cheryl, that's been the driving force for her work, for her advocacy, to make sure that there's some accountability brought to the United States government as it relates to these electrocutions and other issues, but, in particular, the electrocutions that cost her son his life.

And I think that often it's difficult enough to get through the tragedy of losing a loved one, but to be able to use your own witness to help other families is especially impressive.

There is a prayer that many soldiers carried in Vietnam, a prayer for safety and deliverance, that was one time given to my father. I had never heard about it before he was given this prayer.

And I was thinking about that last night. When you think about when someone goes into battle and that prayer is whispered, a prayer for safety and deliverance, that they will be safe in battle and they will be delivered home, God willing.

I don't think anyone could imagine, when they whisper that prayer in Vietnam or in Iraq or anywhere else where there's been conflict, that safety would involve something as fundamental as the safety that prevents you from being electrocuted in a shower, for example.

But that, unfortunately, is why we're here today.

And we don't express -- we don't do a very good job, I guess, elected officials don't often do a very good job of expressing what it means to a family to lose a loved one in battle, especially to lose a loved one in battle in this way.

But sometimes artists do it better than -- much better than elected officials do. I was thinking of Bruce Springsteen's line about -- he wrote a song after September 11 and it was a song about grief and loss and how to deal with that.

And the name of the song is "Missing" and he says at one point in that song, "You're missing. When I turn out the lights, you're missing. When I close my eyes, you're missing. And when I see the sunrise, you're missing."

And I can't even imagine what these families today are going through, having to relive and having to continue to confront that grief, but they're showing us by their witness today great courage and great fortitude.

I wanted to conclude with just some thoughts about two letters, one letter that I sent already that elicited a response and one letter that we're sending today.

Both of them are letters to General Petraeus. The first letter, asking him to answer questions after his testimony in April before the Foreign Relations Committee, elicited a response and in that response, we learned, for the first time, that the number of deaths by electrocution was actually 13 and not 12.

But that's not all that we learned, as important as that is.

We learned that the Pentagon, is what this response disclosed, that the Pentagon has ordered Kellogg, Brown and Root to, quote, "implement a theater-wide full technical inspection of all maintained facilities where no prior inspection was performed," unquote.

That was positive news. But the question we have to ask is: why would it take a letter like that all this time later, when there is evidence on the record -- in fact, in 2004, in October, and this is what I'm asking General Petraeus in the letter today, why the Pentagon did nothing when Brett Blount, a safety specialist with the Army Corps of Engineers, filed a report in October of 2004, October of 2004, Ryan Maseth lost his life in January of 2008, a report in October 2004 describing electrocutions in Iraq as a, quote, "killer of soldiers," unquote.

He went on to declare -- this is a safety specialist. This isn't some observer of the scene. This is a specialist in safety. He went on to declare in this report, quote, "We have had several shocks in showers and near misses here in Baghdad, as well as in other parts of the country. As we install temporary and permanent power on our projects, we must ensure that we require our contracts to properly ground electrical systems," unquote.

That's October of 2004.

Now, we're sitting here in the middle of 2008 and we're still talking about this and there's an inspection going on in the -- an investigation going on in the Department of Defense.

And when I write a letter to have the General Accountability Office review this, they say, "Oh, no, we've got to let the investigation in DOD be completed."

Well, I don't care what they have to do. It's about time that there was some measure of basic accountability brought to bear on this problem. And if that means someone should lose their job and be fired in the Department of Defense, that's the least that the American people should have a right to expect.

So this is about a lot of things. But it's principally about justice, about accountability, and about trust. And if the president of the United States and the Department of Defense can't understand that, then this country is really headed in the wrong direction.

So for no other reason, I'd say to the administration, when you consider what Cheryl and Lorraine and other families have been through, it's about time we got some answers on this at long last.

Today, I hope, is one shaft of light in this darkness, but it's about time that our government tell the American people what happened here, why it happened, and bring some accountability to the department, to Kellogg, Brown and Root, and whoever else is involved in allowing conditions to exist where, when a soldier walks into a shower, they lose their life. That is an abomination.

So I'm grateful for the opportunity today to be here, Senator Dorgan, and I appreciate your...

SEN. DORGAN: Senator Casey, thank you very much.

SEN. CASEY: ... willingness to have this hearing.

SEN. DORGAN: Senator Brown?

SEN. BROWN: Thank you, Senator Dorgan.

I will be very brief. First, Ms. McGee and Ms. Harris, I'm so sorry for your loss and thank you for speaking out and doing what you're doing today and before today.

The other three of you, especially Jefferey Bliss, from Clyde, Ohio, welcome and thank you for your courage. It takes a lot of guts to sit in front of us and talk to cameras and talk to the American public and speak out when you've had loss like you have and when you take the risks that the three of you have taken.

So I thank you for that.

Our job is to investigate a tragedy that was -- a series of tragedies, really, that have been rooted in incompetence and dumb indifference and perhaps immorality.

Our job is to work with you and work with our government to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

So I look forward to your testimony. Thank you to all of you.

SEN. DORGAN: Senator Brown, thank you very much.

Just one point as I begin the introductions. We understand, in wartime, we understand

that there will be casualties. You can understand a news story that says an American soldier was killed by an enemy combatant.

You don't understand when an American soldier is killed as a result of sloppy work by a contractor. Not only do you not understand it, it cannot be justified or tolerated or allowed to continue.

Congressman Kevin Brady of Texas, the 8th district of Texas, has been engaged with Lorraine McGee, working with Lorraine McGee on her issues, and he wanted to come today and introduce Lorraine McGee.

Congressman Brady, we're happy to have you here. Why don't you proceed?

REP. BRADY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Members of the committee, thank you very much for allowing me to be here today.

And, Chairman, you're right, to holding accountable those responsible for the safety and security of our soldiers is neither Republican nor Democrat issue. It's an American issue, and I applaud these efforts, and to all the committee members, as well.

Senator Casey, like you, we are experiencing a loss of life of constituents due to these tragedies, and I appreciate your leadership on this issue, as well.

I am here to introduce Ms. Lorraine McGee from Huntsville, Texas. Ms. McGee is the mother of Staff Sergeant Christopher Everett, who was killed in Iraq in 2005 when he was electrocuted by an improperly grounded power-washer as he was washing down a Humvee.

In Chris's case, we lost a promising 23-year-old National Guardsman, with a bright future and a loving family. And most concerning is that his case was not an isolated incident.

Losing one American soldier to faulty grounding is unacceptable, but continuing to lose more American lives is simply unforgiveable.

To date, 10 American soldiers, one Marine and two U.S. contractors are known to have died from electrocution, and scores more have been shocked and injured due to faulty electrical systems.

I know, as you do, Chairman, we can do better. We must do better for our fighting men and women, for the memory of those we have lost.

Ms. McGee has spent, and her husband, Alton, have spent the week here in Washington raising awareness not only about Chris' death, but the failures that led up to his death and the fact that the same failures remain today.

I'm extremely proud of the courage that Ms. McGee has displayed since losing her son and I commend her for her strong efforts to prevent more lives from being lost, especially now that we know the cause.

We have not done enough. I know that Secretary Gates personally is committed to the safety and security of our military men and women, but we have not done enough.

Therefore, I have urged the Pentagon to expedite all congressional requests for information and have requested a full accounting of all the steps that have been taken and are underway to correct dangerous and poorly grounded electrical equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I'll conclude with this. Ms. McGee was horrified to learn that her son's death was not the first nor the last. I and I think the American people find that equally shocking.

I hope that Congress takes action now to determine, first, fix the problem and, secondly, fix the blame and hold accountable those who have contributed to this.

And, again, on behalf of the constituents of the 8th congressional district of Texas, we are extremely proud of Ms. McGee and are determined to help her find the answers to her son's death.

Thank you.

SEN. DORGAN: Congressman Brady, you're very thoughtful to come to our committee and introduce Lorraine McGee today. We appreciate it very much.

REP. BRADY: Thank you. And, Chairman, if you will, in a few moments, I'm going to Walter Reed to visit with our injured soldiers there, as well. So after Ms. McGee's testimony, I'll excuse myself.

Thank you.

SEN. DORGAN: Thank you very much.

Senator Whitehouse, we are just about to call on Cheryl Harris, our first witness. Did you have...

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: I do not want to stand in the way of that.

SEN. DORGAN: All right. Senator Whitehouse, thank you for being with us.

Cheryl Harris is the mother of Staff Sergeant Ryan Maseth, a former Green Beret, who lost his life in Iraq. He was electrocuted while showering in his barracks in early 2008.

She's a resident of Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania. Our colleague, Senator Casey,

has spoken of her.

And, Cheryl Harris, thank you very much for being with us. We deeply appreciate it.

I would say to all of you, you have submitted written statements, we will include your entire statement as a part of the permanent record and you may summarize as you choose or wish.

Ms. Harris, thank you very much for being here.

CHERYL HARRIS, MOTHER OF STAFF SGT. RYAN MASETH: Thank you. I'd like to thank the committee for this opportunity to testify and share my concern for the safety of our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

My name is Cheryl Harris. I'm the mother of Staff Sergeant Ryan Maseth. He died from electrocution while taking a shower at the Radwaniyah Palace Complex in Baghdad, Iraq on January 2, 2008.

Ryan was a decorated Special Forces Army Ranger and Green Beret and is one of several service members to have unnecessarily died by accidental electrocution during mundane daily activities in Iraq.

My son died while serving his country. His death was unnecessary. His death was preventable.

His death makes me wonder who is looking out for our troops.

His death leads me to ask: who can the troops in Iraq count on to ensure that this same fate doesn't await them?

I stand before you today to demand accountability, to implore that preventative measures be adopted, and to ask for your commitment that no military family will have to endure the paralyzing pain of this type of senseless tragedy.

My personal ordeal began the night of January 2, 2008, when an Army chaplain and two Army noncommissioned officers came to my door at 9:45 p.m.

Both my twin sons, Ryan and Brandon, were serving tours of duty in Iraq. Ryan was on a second tour and Brandon was on a third tour.

I knew when I came to the door that night that something very serious had happened to one of my sons. I was hoping it was simply an injury and not death.

I asked who it was and I was told Ryan had been killed. I asked how it happened, and they could not answer me. At that time, I was left with unanswered questions about Ryan's death, not to mention incredible grief.

Since the time my twins and their younger brother, Adam, entered the Army, I always lived with the fear that I may face the news that one of my sons had been killed in the line of duty.

On January 2, 2008, that fear was realized.

What I did not expect to hear, though, was the manner of death that my son, Ryan, a decorated Army Ranger and Green Beret, experienced. While I had always been prepared to hear that one of my sons died by way of a firefright or a roadside bomb, I was dumbstruck to hear, on the day following the news of my son's death, that he was electrocuted while taking a shower in his living quarters on his Army base at the Radwaniyah Palace Complex in Baghdad.

Since January, I have taken a decided approach to find out what actually happened to my son and why he was electrocuted in the shower at the age of 24.

I have learned that my son's electrocution was the result of the failure to correct a known electrical hazard in a building replete with electrical hazards.

Moreover, because of those uncorrected electrical hazards, my son, in electrified water, he laid there until he was discovered by a fellow soldier, who kicked the door down.

There lying on the ground was my son's body, burnt and smoldering. One of the soldiers who attempted to rescue Ryan was himself shocked, because the electrical current was still running through the water in the pipes in Ryan's bathroom.

I have also learned that Kellogg, Brown and Root knew of this very hazard since at least February 10, 2007, 11 months before Ryan's death. When they conducted inspection of the facilities where Ryan lived, the deficiencies KBR noted on that date included, among others, the fact that the building's main circuit panel, the secondary feeder panel and the water tank were not grounded.

The wiring leading into the secondary electrical panel was not sized properly for the main breakers, did not have proper thermal coating, and did not meet U.S. or British electrical standards.

Additionally, the circuit breaker was rendered inoperable because the tar that had been used to seal the breaker box had melted in the summer into the panel itself.

Let me repeat, these hazards were documented 11 months prior to my son being electrocuted in January of 2008.

It is my understanding that the prior occupant of Ryan's room was shocked in the same room four to five times between June and October 2007, in the exact shower where Ryan was killed.

According to his sworn affidavit, each time this soldier was shocked, he submitted a work order to KBR and each time, KBR showed up and attempted to fix the problem.

On at least one of these service calls, KBR went to the roof and inspected the water pump, which means that KBR would have known before Ryan's death that the water pump was not grounded.

I have also come to learn that in October 2004, another soldier in Iraq died in almost the exact same way and that the U.S. Army safety center had warned that electrical hazards in Iraq were the unexpected killer of our troops stationed in Iraq.

I have learned that many soldiers have been electrocuted and scores more shocked due to known electrical hazards, including the lack of electrical grounding.

Ryan's death was preventable. I am compelled to ask: who is looking out for our troops?

Who can the troops in Iraq count on to ensure that this same fate doesn't await them?

Our soldiers have enough concerns for their safety on the battlefield that they should not have to be worried about simple things, such as taking a shower.

It will come as no surprise to the committee that a parent who loses a child at far too young an age is grief stricken. It should also come as no surprise that as a military family, we spend every day prepared to face the stark reality of the phone call that comes in the middle of the night alerting us that our son or daughter are no longer with us.

Ryan was an Army Ranger and a Green Beret. He could have survived weeks in isolation behind enemy lines. He was trained to handle adversity that few of us can fathom.

It is unacceptable that extreme recklessness and a total disregard for public safety has deprived the Army of this exemplary young soldier and deprived my family of our son and brother.

I remain hopeful that the committee's efforts to investigate both the electrical hazards, are troops safe, and the government's response to those hazards will ensure that senseless deaths by electrocution and injuries from electrical shock can be avoided and even eliminated in the future.

I am pleading, and, believe me, I am pleading with you to take the necessary steps to hold those responsible accountable and to support our troops by making these necessary changes.

My son's young life was dedicated to the service of this country. He had a deep sense of obligation to his fellow soldiers and an unbreakable bond with his brothers, Brandon and Adam.

We can never undo what was done, but we can make certain that Ryan's death was not in vain. My son was my hero. Actually, my son is my hero.

With your actions today, you will enable him to continue on in the heroic spirit for country and brotherhood.

Thank you.

SEN. DORGAN: Ms. Harris, thank you very much. It is testimony that leaves me both angry and grief stricken at the same time. It's almost unbelievable testimony and I know hard for you to give, but thank you so much for being here. We appreciate that.

MS. HARRIS: Thank you.

SEN. DORGAN: The Congressman has already introduced Lorraine McGee. Lorraine McGee is the mother of Army Staff Sergeant Christopher Everett, who was electrocuted while power-washing a Humvee vehicle in Iraq in 2005.

Ms. McGee is a resident of Huntsville, Texas.

Ms. McGee, thank you for being with us. You may proceed.

LARRAINE MCGEE, MOTHER OF STAFF SGT. CHRISTOPHER EVERETT: Thank you. Distinguished members of this committee, I would like to thank you for allowing me to be here and to speak to you.

My name is Lorraine McGee, from Huntsville, Texas. My son, Staff Sergeant Christopher Lee Everett, lost his life serving this great country on September 7, 2005 in Iraq.

He was only 23 years old. He did not die from the bullet of a terrorist, a roadside bomb or an IED. He was electrocuted.

I would like to share his story.

Chris joined the Texas Army National Guard right out of high school. He loved the outdoors and he loved working with his hands.

In the summer of 2004, when he was doing his two-week training at Fort Hood, a unit from Fort Worth, Texas was also there. The Fort Worth unit of the Texas National Guard told of their upcoming deployment and asked for volunteers to join them to increase their numbers.

Chris was one of the first to volunteer. He had already spent 10 months at the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas from August 2002 through June 2003, providing extra security after 9/11.

He felt that going to Iraq was an even greater way to help his country.

On January 1, 2005, 3,000 Army National Guard soldiers from Texas left for Iraq. They were to be home in time for Christmas of 2005.

Chris did not make it back alive.

On September 7, 2005, Chris was working in the motor pool at Camp Taqaddum in Iraq. He was power-washing the sand from the underside of a Humvee that needed to be worked on.

He was working alone at about 6:15 p.m., when he was instantly killed by an electrical shock.

In a report presented to me in December of 2005, the Army stated that the generator supplying electricity to the power-washer was improperly grounded, resulting in an electrical current passing to the power-washer and through the water in the hose to the nozzle Chris was holding.

The report also indicated that motor pool soldiers tasked with washing vehicles had previously complained about being shocked while using the power-washer.

The unit involved attached additional grounding rods to the generator prior to this incident and all persons involved said they thought the problem had been fixed.

The unit leadership had also asked for help performing electrical repairs and was told that base operations was then currently working on the electrical issues.

When the Army presented me with this report, they led me to believe that Chris' incident was the first such fatality. They told me outright that as a result of Chris' death, all generators across Iraq were being properly grounded so that this would not happen again.

That was the only consolation I had that Chris' death would at least keep it from happening to someone else.

All this time, I thought Chris' accident was an isolated incident.

Not until April 30, 2008, when Jim Risen from the "New York Times" contacted me did I find out differently.

I now know that Chris was the fourth soldier to be electrocuted due to faulty electrical grounding and that there have been at least 11 soldiers in all electrocuted since 2003.

Not only have there been multiple electrocutions, but I also found out that the Army issued a report entitled "Electrocution: The Unexpected Killer" in October of 2004.

I quote from that report, "There are many hazards in combat, including the enemy and his weapon, the heat and cold, and vehicle and weapons accidents. However, another killer of soldiers has emerged in Iraq this past year -- electrocution -- and it's a killer that is growing at an alarming rate."

The report continues, "As we install temporary and permanent power on our projects, we must ensure we require contractors to properly ground electrical systems."

My son should have never died. Ryan Maseth should have never died. Proper grounding of electricity is a basic safety requirement. The problem was known long before Chris' death.

Posthumously, Chris was promoted to staff sergeant and was awarded the bronze star, the combat action badge, and the Army good conduct medal. One of the reasons he received the bronze star was because on May 4, 2005, while on patrol, Chris discovered a cache of hidden weapons.

It was the largest discovered cache of weapons for the battalion. It eliminated a deadly threat to Camp Taqaddum, denying the enemy the ability to inflict casualties on coalition forces.

Chris was awarded the combat action badge because on August 12, 2005, he responded to indirect enemy fire and assessed damage and was prepared to provide aid to any casualties as a result of enemy rocket fire in the battalion area at Camp Taqaddum.

He received the Army good conduct medal for exemplary behavior, efficiency and fidelity during his time in Iraq.

Chris never knew he had been recommended for these honors.

Anger has now taken over my grief. I plead with you to do something to bring an end to this unnecessary cause of death to our soldiers.

They should not have to worry about stepping into a shower or using a power-washer in the safety of an established base.

Chris believed he was making a difference in Iraq. Please do not let his death be in vain.

Thank you.

SEN. DORGAN: Lorraine, thank you very, very much. I know that were Ryan Maseth here or Christopher Everett here today, they'd be awfully proud of their mothers, and we thank you for being here.

Lorraine and Cheryl, we appreciate the difficulty of the testimony and appreciate your

providing it.

We have three additional witnesses who will talk about their observations from working in Iraq.

One of them is Rachel McNeill. Sergeant Rachel McNeill has been and is a member of the U.S. Army Reserves since 2002. She served from January through December in 2005 in Iraq as a heavy construction equipment operator, with the 983rd Engineer Battalion.

Sergeant McNeill is a resident of Madison, Wisconsin.

Sergeant McNeill, thank you very much for being with us, and you may proceed.

RACHEL MCNEILL, U.S. ARMY RESERVE (983rd ENGINEER BATTALION): My name is Rachel McNeill. I'm from Madison, Wisconsin, and I've been in the Army Reserves for almost six years.

I served as a construction equipment operator with the 983rd Engineer Battalion from January through December of 2005.

The first soldiers from my company flew into Camp Speicher from Kuwait in mid-January 2005, while the rest of us continued to up-armor our vehicles and load our construction equipment onto civilian trucks for transport into Iraq.

A week later, soldiers from our company left to convoy into the country and, a few days after that, I flew into Camp Speicher.

When I arrived, my platoon had already moved into our housing area. Most of our battalion lived in three- to five-bedroom houses. All the females in our company shared two houses.

To the soldiers on base, our worn down living quarters were affectionately known as "the crack houses."

Despite the name, all of the houses had electricity in them and most had indoor plumbing, including faucets, a shower and a water heater.

KBR was the contractor responsible for maintenance and repairs in our housing area. They stopped daily to refill our water tank that was located in the front yard of our house.

Once the tank had been filled, we turned on the water pumps with a switch and moved the water from that tank into the yard to the one on the roof of our house for use.

Once the water was pumped into the water tank on the roof, the switch to the pump was turned off. From the start, there were problems with the system supposedly maintained by KBR.

The water heater would randomly shoot steaming hot water onto the sidewalk and into our back yard. I was told by the other women in my group to use the shower in the other female house when I arrived, because they had been shocked in the shower in our house from the time they had first moved in, when they tried to adjust the temperature of the water.

They said that while the water was on, they were jolted by electricity.

I don't know whether the engineer unit that occupied the house before ours had the same problem when they were using the shower. However, the previous occupants did tell us that it was more efficient to try and fix the problems ourselves.

KBR had a reputation for taking a long time to address repairs. So we learned that it made sense to submit a work order to KBR only when there were major problems that we couldn't fix ourselves.

In this situation, an electrician from another platoon in my company came over to the house to determine why the shower was shocking soldiers when they used it.

It turned out that it was an easy fix. The soldier said that our water heater simply needed to be grounded.

The entire repair would take less than a half an hour to complete.

An easy fix, yet we couldn't rely on KBR to take care of it in a timely manner or to find the problem in an inspection before we moved in.

If we had submitted a work order to KBR to fix the problem, who knows how much longer we would have waited or if other soldiers would have been unnecessarily shocked in the showers. Who knows whether a member of my group could have been seriously injured or even killed.

I also remember the electrician who fixed the grounding saying that it wasn't the first house to have the problem in our company area. It seems we weren't the only ones suffering from KBR's lack of responsiveness to the needs of the soldiers in Iraq.

After the electrician from our platoon fixed the problem, no one else was shocked, that I am aware of.

In February of that year, to attest to the quality of the work that was received by KBR, we had a work order to fix a problem with a pipe on our sink. The KBR worker came in and he tried to take the pipe off and the result was that boiling hot water was flooding our house.

The civilian then left and the two females had to run across the street to find other males

in our platoon to help them stop the water by turning off the tank on the roof.

I'm here today because I believe our men and women overseas deserve better. There's no reason that someone fighting for our country should be exposed to such a risk.

In the military, safety is always a priority. Steps are taken to minimize risks wherever possible. In my experience with contractors, however, safety often seems to be an afterthought.

There needs to be much greater oversight on the basic services provided by contractors such as KBR. In my opinion, the electrocutions and electrical shocks of soldiers are not just isolated incidents. They are the tip of an iceberg when it comes to a lack of responsibility by contractors.

Contractors need to uphold the same standards of safety that the military does if they are responsible for our services as vital and basic as food, water and shelter for our troops.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

SEN. DORGAN: Thank you very much for being here today. You indicate that you wanted to testify when you had heard and read a story about a Green Beret who had died of electrocution. And so you reflected on your experience and wished to testify.

I noted that you are still a member of the Army Reserves and I hope you will report to us if there are any consequences of your testifying, because you are speaking publicly and we have had other circumstances where some have experienced consequences for speaking out.

But please make sure that you contact us if that would be the case. I would hope it would not be.

But thank you for coming.

Debbie Crawford is a licensed journeyman electrician with 30 years experience in the trade. In 1979, she became the first woman in her local to become a journeyman electrician.

She worked for Kellogg, Brown and Root in the green zone in Iraq for two years. In her first year, she worked as an electrician performing electrical work and supervising local Iraqi electricians. In her second year, she worked as an administrative specialist in the same organization, where her responsibilities were to coordinate the safety program.

She's a resident of Battle Ground, Washington.

Ms. Crawford, thank you for coming to Washington today. You may proceed.

DEBBIE CRAWFORD, FORMER KBR ELECTRICIAN: Thank you. My name is Debbie Crawford. I am a journeyman electrician and have been in the trade nearly 30 years. I hold a journeyman license in both Oregon and Washington.

I worked for KBR, also known as Service Employees International, Incorporated, in the green zone in Iraq from July 2004 to July 2006. During my first year, I worked as an electrician, performing electrical work and supervising local Iraqi electricians.

During my second year, I worked as an administrative specialist in the same organization, where one of my primary responsibilities was coordinating the department's safety program.

The lack of proper tools and material was a consistent problem. The most basic tools and equipment were not always available or were of poor quality.

Some craftspeople brought their own personal tools from the states. Even the most basic materials, such as electrical tape and wire nuts, were at times scarce.

This lack of tools and materials forced work to be done in a less than professional manner. It also encouraged hoarding by employees, which only compounded the problem.

Most work done in the green zone was awarded to subcontractors. The subcontractors employed third-country national and local national workers who were not familiar or skilled in U.S. quality standards, U.S. safety standards, and installation techniques or U.S. codes.

It was not uncommon for KBR electricians to go in after a subcontractor has supposedly completed a job to actually complete it or repair their work.

The construction of small, temporary man camps was a particular problem and I personally received several complaints from Blackwater employees that they were being shocked in their trailers.

The KBR employees supervising these electrical contractors often had no electrical experience at all. It was not uncommon for a labor foreman with no electrical experience to supervise Iraqi electrical subcontractors or third-country nationals doing electrical work.

While working in Iraq, I saw green wire, which is specifically designated by the national electric code as ground, used as a hot wire. I brought this to my foreman's attention, but my complaints were totally disregarded.

When I pressed him, I was told that was all they had, make it work, and don't worry about it.

This was just one of countless examples of poor leadership and poor workmanship by KBR in Iraq.

There are many qualified and competent KBR electricians, but not all KBR electricians were qualified to do this kind of work. When I applied in 2004, the job posting stated a license was required. No one in Houston asked to see my license or checked my job references and no qualifications test was given.

The current KBR job posting has no licensing requirements and states “typically requires two to five years of related experience.”

In the United States, five years of experience barely gets through an apprenticeship program.

We had one new hire show up in Iraq as a journeyman electrician to do construction and maintenance work. He installed telephone lines in the United States. He was concerned about his safety because he was clearly working outside his area of expertise.

He told me his qualifications were clearly stated on his resume. I contacted our foreman and he was transferred to the communications department.

It is safe to assume he is not the first or the last electrician hired and expected to perform work outside their area of expertise.

Supervision by KBR was also sorely lacking. My electrical general foreman at the palace was not even an electrician, and yet he would argue with qualified electricians about quality, code and safety issues.

He insisted I work on energized circuits in order to not inconvenience the client, but then questioned my qualifications if I got shocked.

It got to the point that I would not inform him of everything I was doing in order to ensure I could do it correctly and safely.

How can you effectively supervise electricians when you don't understand what they're doing or what the potential ramifications are if it's not done correctly?

Qualified electricians found it difficult to deal with the complacency, the lack of leadership, the lack of tools and material and the lack of safety. Many didn't make it a month before they quit and went home.

Many of those who were committed to completing their contracts found themselves in constant conflict with supervisors, engineers and the safety department.

Some just gave up and complied with their instructions.

Time and time again, we heard “This is not the state, OSHA doesn’t apply here. You’re in a war zone. What do you expect? And if you don’t like it, you can go home.”

The threats to send employees home were so prevalent that KBR corporate had to remind its supervisors and managers that it was against company policy to threaten employees.

It was very common to threaten an employee with a transfer to a more hostile camp as a deterrent to raising concerns.

During the two years I was in Iraq working for KBR, I had not heard of any deaths due to accidental electrocution. To the best of my knowledge, there was no official KBR statement asking electricians and other personnel to take extra precautions.

The electricians were not asked to heighten their level of awareness to potential shock hazards. There was no supplemental training given on effective grounding and bonding.

KBR has claimed that its contract did not cover fixing potential hazards, only repairing them after they broke down.

It is my professional opinion that reported electrical shocks are not a potential hazard. It is an imminent hazard that needs immediate attention to prevent serious injury and death.

KBR claims to have an unwavering commitment to safety, but chose not to make these necessary repairs because the company claimed it was not part of the contract.

As part of this commitment to safety, did KBR prohibit its own employees from entering the buildings where electrical shocks were taking place? I suspect not.

The deaths we are discussing could just as easily have been a KBR employee, most likely an unsuspecting plumber.

It saddens and angers me that at least 11 American soldiers and two civilian contractors have died due to electrocution, not in combat, but at camps and bases where they should have felt the safest.

As licensed electricians, we are bound to protect human life first and foremost. We did not do that and I feel we have failed them.

Thank you.

SEN. DORGAN: Ms. Crawford, thank you very much for your testimony and for traveling to Washington, D.C.

Finally, we will hear from Jefferey Bliss, who is a former Kellogg, Brown and Root electrician, worked for Kellogg, Brown and Root in Afghanistan as a field combat

electrician from 2005 until 2006.

He is a licensed electrician and is a resident of Clyde, Ohio.

Mr. Bliss, you may proceed.

JEFFEREY BLISS, FORMER KBR ELECTRICIAN: Thank you, Senator.

My name is Jefferey Bliss. I live in Clyde, Ohio and work at Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Station in Oak Harbor, Ohio, for the First Energy Corporation from Akron.

In 1985, I joined the Navy as an electrician and have been one ever since. I worked on amphibious assault ships and taught electronics at an ASW base in San Diego for two years.

I had extensive training in many schools throughout the eight years I served in the Navy. I am a journeyman electrician, ex-Local 8 construction electrician in Toledo, and presently work in IBEW 245 for First Energy as a maintenance electrician.

We have a safety conscious work environment and safety is paramount for the public's welfare in our industry.

In 2003, in a weakening economy, I was laid off from my job in Toledo. While laid off, I heard that Halliburton-KBR was hiring for work they were doing in Iraq and Afghanistan under the LOGCAP-III contract.

I researched KBR-Halliburton on the Internet, made some calls, and signed up with a recruiter. Looking back now, it seems crazy that I did it, but like I said, it was a tough economy and layoffs were prevalent.

I started with KBR in January 2005 as an electrician assigned to Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan, near Kabul. Two fellow electricians from Toledo also went with me to Afghanistan.

We were all told we would work together at Bagram. Once we arrived there, we were split up almost immediately. One was sent to a base near the border with Pakistan. The other electrician and I were sent to the combined joint operating areas, CJOA North and CJOA South, respectively.

The unit that I was to be assigned to, called CJOA, traveled the country by airplane, helicopter or road convoys to support forward operating bases and provincial reconstruction teams. These were called FOBs and PRTs.

This assignment brought with it an increased risk to us for no additional pay, we found. Working for CJOA, though, gave me the chance to see much more of the country than I would have at Bagram Air Force Base. I would see much in my experiences with KBR

that would surprise and amaze me.

The carelessness and disregard for quality work at KBR was pervasive. For one thing, the company did not provide electricians with the tools they needed to do the job properly.

On my first assignment, I was given a pair of lineman's pliers and a screwdriver, no meter, no other tools. I would have been happy to bring tools myself, but I was specifically told not to.

I was told I would find what I needed in the field and from other KBR workers and soldiers.

I was also surprised to discover how many KBR electricians did not have the right experience and training, qualifications and licensing.

KBR hired many third-country nationals, called TCNs, who weren't familiar with our electrical standards. Many of them also did not speak English, which made it difficult for them to communicate with us as we tried to correct problems.

These shortcomings were made worse by the fact that KBR failed to provide adequate supervision of the work done by its electricians at almost every base I went to in Afghanistan.

This lack of supervision was part of what I considered a "good old boy" network, where communication was poor and professionalism almost nonexistent.

Even though we were there to make money as electricians, I felt we had a responsibility for the safety of others, not just to make the lights come on and the motors turn. That's why we have an NEC in this country.

However, this sense of responsibility was rarely on display. The attitude of the KBR supervisors was usually, and I can quote again, "This is a war zone. What are you going to do?"

I saw firsthand how KBR's carelessness unnecessarily put people's lives in danger. In Qalat, we were at an outpost at the castle of Alexander the Great. I was working on a generator and its distribution panel.

I observed the panel was not properly grounded. The electrode was not bonded to the grounded wire, as required by the national electrical code.

After making notes and a materials list to correct this, I was told there was also a problem with a branch wire feeding a Conex box next to that panel. The Conex box was used as their tactical operations center, or TOC. The soldier showed me the wire, which was the wrong kind to be used in any case, and told me it went up on top of the box and entered under some sand bags.

So we had to climb on top of the Conex box to access and inspect the wire. Next to the other side of the TOC was a line of HESCOs, or portable bunkers, and on the other side of that, another Conex box used for storage.

As we climbed onto the HESCOs to reach the wire, the soldier placed one of his hands on the box with the fault and the other one on the other container, and screamed and shook for about two seconds. His knees buckled. He fell and shouted to me that he had been shocked.

I immediately took a meter and measured between the boxes and found there were 400 volts AC present. Luckily, the soldier was not injured.

Upon asking questions about the installation from the other soldiers, I found out that a KBR plumber and security officer had wired that panel for them.

I wasn't sure why an electrician hadn't wired it, but I eventually made the repairs and reported the incident to my foreman, who was also an electrician. He said nothing more of the incident to me after that.

This is just one of the many instances I could tell you about and I assure you this was not the only one.

At another of the bases I was stationed, I was told that I would be there for eight days doing an assessment for a new shower and latrine. I ended staying there for 2.5 months, with no assignments.

I was expressly told not to do anything but new construction, which we didn't have the materials to do. So I kept myself busy aiding the soldiers in any way I could.

Throughout my time in Afghanistan, whenever I brought up safety concerns, I was often accused of "big dealing" things by the KBR supervision.

I even tried to start a simple field training program, which was shot down quickly, as no one in KBR management or supervision seemed to care or want to put forth the effort to improve the conditions.

I was glad and honored to have helped the soldiers in Afghanistan, but ashamed and embarrassed to work for this company, because of the way they serve the soldiers there.

Our soldiers deserve better.

Thank you for letting me speak here today on this.

SEN. DORGAN: Mr. Bliss, thank you very much.

I am going to ask a couple of very brief questions and then I will wait until the end and I'll call on my colleagues so they can ask their questions.

A couple of very brief questions.

First, Ms. Crawford and Mr. Bliss, my understanding is that you were paid by Kellogg, Brown and Root or Halliburton through a subsidiary in the Cayman Islands. Is that correct? Is that where your paychecks came from?

MR. BLISS: Yes, sir. SEII.

SEN. DORGAN: I would note that I've held a previous hearing on that subject.

And the purpose of hiring you through a Cayman Islands subsidiary was to allow the Texas company to avoid paying payroll taxes on your payroll. Is that correct?

MR. BLISS: Yes, sir.

SEN. DORGAN: And one other question. Mr. Bliss, I understand that you knew of the hiring of third-country nationals, that is, much cheaper labor, less expensive labor, third-country nationals who were much less experienced, in some cases, not very experienced at all, by Kellogg, Brown and Root for electrical work and then billing them to the federal government at an identical rate as billing for U.S. electricians.

Is that the case?

MR. BLISS: That was my understanding, sir. And it seemed, during the time I was there, initially, the electricians I met were from the root of what KBR had here in the states in Houston and as they started bringing more of us in from the different parts of the United States to fill these billets, we started to see, during my time, more TCNs and HCNs than ever taking our jobs.

SEN. DORGAN: What's a TCN and HCN?

MR. BLISS: Host country nationals, which would be Afghans in that country, and TCNs, which would be people from any other country that they used to work in Halliburton.

SEN. DORGAN: Much less experienced.

MR. BLISS: Yes.

SEN. DORGAN: And you understand or at least based on what you had heard, they were being billed at the same rate as an experienced U.S. electrician.

MR. BLISS: I had no reason to think otherwise. I don't know this for a fact.

SEN. DORGAN: Thank you very much.

Ms. Harris, what was the initial explanation the Army gave you for your son's death?

MS. HARRIS: Initially, they told me that Ryan was possibly electrocuted in a shower with a small appliance. Within a few days, and I don't have the timeframe in front of me, I was told that there were electrical lines hanging over Ryan's shower and they had touched the water pipes and Ryan somehow reached up and touched water pipes, which, again, was inaccurate.

And then...

SEN. DORGAN: But who told you that he possibly had gone into the shower with an electrical appliance?

MS. HARRIS: That information came from the casualty assistance center.

SEN. DORGAN: From the U.S. Army.

MS. HARRIS: Yes.

SEN. DORGAN: Based on your evaluation, you've looked into this pretty carefully, is there any basis for anyone to have said to you?

MS. HARRIS: No, none at all.

SEN. DORGAN: Has the Army been cooperative since then in helping you try to understand and get to the bottom of this?

MS. HARRIS: No. They say they will be. They tell me they'll answer my questions, but I'm still pursuing that at six months later.

The 15-6 family briefing has been closed and the CID completed their investigation, and I still have a list of questions that are outstanding, along with a very serious question of whether there was a safety investigation completed.

I was told there would be six months ago when Ryan died and I'm still asking that same question, along with my list of questions that have not been answered.

SEN. DORGAN: I have other questions, including questions for Ms. McGee, but I think what I will do is call on Senator Casey, Senator Whitehouse and Senator Klobuchar for their questions, and if they would do five-minute rounds.

If you want to do a second round, that would be fine.

Senator Casey?

SEN. CASEY: Thank you very much.

I want to again reiterate my thanks to all of you and especially to Lorraine and Cheryl for your testimony today and your courage.

I wanted to probe a little bit on kind of the mechanics here. We've got two people here who not only have broad experience as electricians, but also are witnesses, firsthand witnesses.

This isn't some hearsay. You've seen up close the problems.

I wanted, first of all, to turn to Ms. Crawford. You said, at one point in your testimony, that -- I guess it was a KBR representative, someone in the chain of command, so to speak, said, quote, "Make it work."

What did he mean? Can you go back and kind of reiterate that and just amplify that?

MS. CRAWFORD: It was part of the prison -- or palace compound. We were talking the old palace jail and turning it into an office building.

SEN. DORGAN: Can you speak into the microphone, Ms. Crawford?

MS. CRAWFORD: I'm sorry. We were taking the palace jail, the old palace jail, and turning it into an office building and we were rewiring it and when I got transferred onto that job after I got there, I was kind of taking it over and I was trying to get up to speed on what had been done and was opening up all the panels.

And this building feed had been pulled with green wire, the hots, the three hots, and that's -- you can't get much more illegal than that as far as the national electrical code goes.

So I mentioned it to my foreman. I was kind of appalled. I wanted to redo the whole thing. And he said -- he'd been there a while and he said, "Just make it work. Don't worry about it. Forget it. Close the door. Stop looking at it."

SEN. CASEY: How long would it have taken you to redo it, as you say?

MS. CRAWFORD: Part of it was in a ditch. They would've had to re-dig the ditch. So probably a couple of days.

SEN. CASEY: I was just stunned by so much of what you said and what Mr. Bliss said. I mean, it's -- I don't know where to begin. I mean, it's stunning. It's staggering.

You said that the foreman at the palace wasn't an electrician.

MS. CRAWFORD: No. My foreman.

SEN. CASEY: Your foreman.

MS. CRAWFORD: Right.

SEN. CASEY: Was not an electrician.

MS. CRAWFORD: No, and he would be the first to admit it.

SEN. CASEY: What was he?

MS. CRAWFORD: I think in the states he might have worked for a line company, like a high voltage company, doing something. I'm not exactly sure. But when -- but he was not a licensed electrician. He was not an electrician at all, and we went round and round lots, him and I.

SEN. CASEY: You also talked about no training -- and I'm not quoting you accurately here, but just to -- I just made a note here, no training on grounding.

Tell me about that. A, what would be done in normal circumstances pursuant to requirements and, B, what should have or could have been done here to say, "OK, we're not doing a good job on grounding, we've got to start training people?"

Tell me about that.

MS. CRAWFORD: Well, if it was me in that situation, if you have a trend, if you have something that's trending and you find out that your problem is insufficient grounding, you need to implement some kind of training.

And if it's nothing more than getting all your electricians together and go, "Listen, guys, we've got a problem. We're not getting a sufficient ground and this is how it needs to be done and these are the measurements that we need to get and this is the equipment that needs to be used every single time. And if you have a problem getting that or achieving those, contact me."

SEN. CASEY: And these are questions that I have to ask, because I know nothing about your area of expertise.

If you -- try it as best you can, it's a hypothetical, but try to imagine this scene.

Say you walked into a building, like the building where these showers were where people lost their lives, if you walked in and you knew that there was a problem with that shower, with the grounding, how long would it take for that grounding problem to have been fixed in a typical case, if you can estimate that?

MS. CRAWFORD: Well, it's hard to say. If you know that you have a grounding problem somewhere, you go back to where your power sources are.

The way I would troubleshoot it would be I would go back to where my power sources were for any equipment that was tied into the plumbing system, hot water heaters, water pumps. That's where I'd start.

I'd start by isolating the equipment and see if the problem went away. If the problem went away, then I knew that the problem was in those pieces of equipment.

And if that didn't do it, then I just would keep going. I mean, I wouldn't stop until I found it and I would go as far as to protect the inhabitants of that building, I would go as far as turning the whole building off until we figured out what the problem was.

SEN. CASEY: I know I'm over time, but just one quick question for Mr. Bliss. We'll try to come back to this.

But you, at one point in your testimony, you said that you were accused of, quote, "big dealing" things.

MR. BLISS: Yes, sir.

SEN. CASEY: What do you mean by that?

MR. BLISS: Just the apathy. Personally, from what I saw in management and supervision, it was a climbing up the ladder, "I got this position, I'm moving on to the next."

If there was a problem with someone, they might just move them to another theater or another base. I felt people were collecting paychecks.

I take my job very seriously. I do think that the safety, as Debbie mentioned, is paramount. That's what we're taught in our five years of schooling I paid for on my own and spent my own time at.

NEC is paramount in our training. The grounding chapter of the NEC is the largest chapter, by far, and there's a reason for that. And I once had an instructor that told me if I have two hot wires, two neutral wires and two ground wires, the green ones Debbie refers to, to make up in a box and joints and I have only one wire nut to use and tape on the rest, which one would I use that on, most people say the hot wire, because they think it's a hot wire, but it's the ground wire you put that on.

The ground wire is the first wire you make up in a circuit and it's the last one you take out.

And if there is no grounding structure, if there is no grounding electrode, if there is no

ground back at the main power, like Debbie was saying, then there's no ground into the branches, there's no ground down at the shower nozzle.

SEN. CASEY: Thank you.

SEN. DORGAN: Senator Casey, thank you very much.

I'm going to call on Senator Whitehouse. I have to take a call from the majority leader in the ante room just for a moment. I'll be returning in just a moment.

Senator Whitehouse, to be followed by Senator Klobuchar.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: Thank you, Senator Dorgan.

First of all, thank all of you for coming here today, particularly Ms. McGee and Ms. Harris. I know this is not at all easy for you.

The testimony in this hearing has focused pretty much on the irresponsibility and recklessness of KBR before the fact of these tragedies.

We have not discussed to what extent you're comfortable with the level of accountability that has come after the fact. And the two concepts are related.

If companies think they can get away with things scot free and there's no accountability afterwards, that lends itself to more irresponsibility and recklessness that caused these tragedies in the first place.

Would either of you care to comment on your views and your satisfaction with the extent of KBR's accountability after the fact of the tragedies?

MS. MCGEE: Well, I don't think there is any accountability, because if there had been after the very first electrocution, number one, then the problem would have been fixed. We wouldn't have had three more, with Chris being number four. We wouldn't have lost Ryan.

They are undermining our soldiers' efforts over there by not taking care of them.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: And as far as you're concerned, they're just getting away with it.

MS. MCGEE: Exactly.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: Ms. Harris, when Ryan was killed, he was at the Radwaniyah Palace Complex.

MS. HARRIS: Correct.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: The date was January 2, 2008. Do you know how long the military and/or KBR had had control over that Radwaniyah Palace Complex at the time?

MS. HARRIS: I do. It was February of 2007.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: So they had been there almost a year at that point.

MS. HARRIS: Yes, 11 months prior to Ryan's dying.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: So this wasn't a question of some kind of immediate thing, some camp being put together in a rush and before you could get it right, you just have to do it, so you cut corners.

They had 11 months to get this right.

MS. HARRIS: They had 11 months to get it right and they also did a technical inspection of Ryan's building 11 months prior to Ryan dying and knew of the electrical deficiencies in his building.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: The specific ones that...

MS. HARRIS: Yes.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: ... caused the tragedy.

Ms. Crawford, the palace building that you worked on, what building was that?

MS. CRAWFORD: That was the Republican Palace in the Green Zone.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: And you were working on it, I believe, I don't recall your testimony, in 2005.

MS. CRAWFORD: July 2004 through July 2006.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: Do you know how long we had control over that facility before you got there?

MS. CRAWFORD: It was one of the first buildings that we seized when we went into Iraq.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: In March of '03.

MS. CRAWFORD: Yes. So I would say somewhere in '03.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: So, again, this was not kind of an emergency setup type situation where they're trying to get things done as quickly as possible and potentially have to

jerry rig things until they can come through and do it right.

This was well over a year from when they had control of that facility.

MS. CRAWFORD: Yes. By the time I got there, there should have been no more jerry rigging going on.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: Yes, so it would seem. And when you say -- could you elaborate a little bit on what you said in your testimony? Let me just read it back to you.

“KBR has claimed that its contract did not cover fixing potential hazards, only repairing items after they broke down.”

I guess if they don't work, they'll do something about it; but if they might kill somebody, it's not their problem.

You continue that, “KBR chose not to make these necessary repairs because the company claimed it was, quote, ‘not part of the contract.’”

Could you elaborate a little bit on those comments? That sounds pretty astonishing, just from a human point of view. If you built something and it's dangerous and then you say “I'm not responsible for fixing it because it's not part of the contract to fix what I built.”

MS. CRAWFORD: I think what they were claiming, from the news articles that I read, was that they were claiming that electrical shock was a potential hazard and that it wasn't broke.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: It wasn't what?

MS. CRAWFORD: It wasn't broken. So they weren't required to fix it. And the point I was trying to make is when electricity is going someplace that it's not supposed to be going, it's broke and it needs immediate attention.

And if an electrician can discover, I don't know, correct me if I'm wrong, but this is kind of how I look at it, if someone reports a shock to you, “I got shocked,” and nobody died, that's just like I cannot think of anything more that would have higher priority to repair, because that's a gift. That's a gift that someone was not seriously injured, and it's priority one to fix it, because you might not get a second chance.

So it's broke.

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: For all three of you who served over there and worked over there, we have heard relatively consistent testimony about the atmosphere that the contractors maintained regarding complaints or concerns, whether they had to do with fraud or whether they had to do with safety.

And over and over again, the witnesses that Senator Dorgan has brought to light have testified about, for instance, as soon as they raised a concern about a problem, being taken by armed security guard to the airport and sent home, being put into jail tents and left there, being locked in rooms so that they couldn't discuss anything with anybody until they got whisked away to the airport and put on a plane.

You seem to echo the sense that there is a culture of irresponsibility and non-accountability to the point where even somebody who brings up something as elementary as a basic electric safety hazard is viewed as a problem rather than somebody who's trying to be helpful and protect our troops.

What was your sense on that question, as I have described it to you?

MS. CRAWFORD: When I was at the palace, when I first started there, the Fallujah offensive was going on and that's when things were hot and heavy in Fallujah.

And my foreman, general foreman, whenever I would stand by my ground -- I'm not easily swayed to change my opinion on something. And whenever I would stand my ground with him and tell him that I wasn't going to do it that way or whatever I told him, he made several comments to "they need electricians in Fallujah," which, to me, was an intimidation tactic.

It's like, "Shut up, do what I tell you to do or I'm sending you to Fallujah."

SEN. DORGAN: Might I just, on that point...

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: My time has...

SEN. DORGAN: On that point, we had a man named Rory Mayberry testify, I guess this was two years ago or so, he was a food service supervisor and he was testifying that the food would come into the Army camps with date expired on the food and he was told by his supervisors, "It doesn't matter, just feed it to the troops."

And he talked about 10,000 meals being billed when 5,000 meals were being served. And he was told, "When auditors come to the camp, don't you dare speak to the auditors and if you complain about this or speak to the auditors, you likely will be sent to Fallujah." Fallujah was hot and heavy at that same point.

But it's interesting you say the same kind of approach was used with you as we have had previously testified to before this committee by Rory Mayberry.

Senator Whitehouse, thank you very much.

Senator Klobuchar?

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: My deepest sympathies to you, Ms. Harris, and you, Ms. McGee. I

have always believed that this is a country where we wrap our arms around those that serve us, like you, Ms. McNeill, that your sons were on the front line and sacrificing for us and that, in the end, our government failed you.

And when I heard Mr. Bliss so candidly -- and thank you, both of you, for coming forward -- talk about how your supervisors would say, "This is a war zone. What are we going to do?"

I want to thank both of you, with mothers, for coming forward and saying, "We are going to do something about this, so this doesn't happen again."

And I also wanted you to know, Ms. Harris, how much Senator Casey has been advocating for you and pushing for you with your Senator from Pennsylvania. He's brought this up at numerous behind closed door meetings, not just when the cameras are on, and trying to get answers and trying to push this.

And I was curious, just to follow-up on some of the things that Senator Whitehouse was asking about. Senator Dorgan asked you about how you first were told that Ryan was -- that he brought something into the shower and then you were told that there were wires hanging down in the shower.

Do you believe that the Army was attempting to make it seem as if your son was partially responsible for his death or that he should have been aware of the risk?

What do you think was going on there or did they just not have the information?

MS. HARRIS: I don't know. I've gone back over it and I'm still attempting to get the answers six months later.

I'm not sure what happened there and they didn't have a good explanation, as far as I was concerned.

When you lose someone and you hear a different reason each time, you relive that nightmare over and over again.

They basically told me that the information didn't travel as quickly as accurately as it should and that I needed to be patient and really I needed to wait.

I didn't understand that. He was electrocuted. They knew when they found him what happened to him. I didn't understand that time between told and then -- I'm not sure where the Army failed there and what happened.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: How did you finally learn the true story?

MS. HARRIS: I learned it from the criminal investigation division, the CID agent that I had been working with. But it was sometime after and I kept demanding that they have

meetings with me.

I had a conference call with the CID initially. The agent was in Harrisburg and the information was being relayed from the CID agent on the ground in Iraq.

And then I met face-to-face with the CID agent. They came to Pittsburgh and sat down with me face-to-face.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And what was your reaction when you found out about the true cause of death and that the Army had been aware of this danger for a number of years?

MS. HARRIS: Well, I didn't find out the Army was aware of the danger for a lot of years, until I started digging and doing the investigation. But my initial reaction, I was so disappointed and frustrated that, first of all, I didn't get accurate information.

To me, that's just completely unacceptable. I couldn't understand why they just couldn't answer my questions and it seemed so evasive.

It just didn't make sense.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: Thank you.

Ms. McGee, when the Army notified you that your son, Chris, who was a decorated member of the Texas Army National Guard, we have a lot of National Guard in Minnesota, so this is close to my heart, that he had died from electrocution, did you feel that they were forthright in providing you with the whole story?

MS. MCGEE: At the time, yes. They led me to believe he was the first and the way they told it, it was an unfortunate accident and they were going to learn from that mistake and everything was going to be corrected so that it wouldn't happen again.

And like I said in my testimony, that was -- in our grief, the consolation we had is that, well, you know, unfortunately, he was the one to suffer the accident, but it's going to prevent someone else, because now they've discovered the problem.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: From what I understand, the Army did admit to you that U.S. soldiers had been shocked before and that they had complained about that.

MS. MCGEE: Yes.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: But they told you that no soldier had died from electrocution.

MS. MCGEE: Died, right.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And they even went so far as to say that all generators across Iraq were being properly grounded so that it wouldn't happen again.

MS. MCGEE: Yes.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And then you later found out, what, three years later, that three years earlier, the Army had circulated a bulletin that cited the death of five soldiers from electrocution and warned of the potential risk to other soldiers.

MS. MCGEE: Yes.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: What was your reaction when you found this out?

MS. MCGEE: Well, believe it or not, when I initially talked to Mr. Risen, I thought it was some scam. I couldn't believe that this was true, what he was telling me.

And so I had to do some investigating myself to find out that he was legit, but when I did, I was just appalled. I couldn't believe that this was actually going on.

How could something so simple as basic grounding not be done over there, especially since they already knew?

When you first discover a problem, that's one thing, but for it to be going on for this many years and not fixing it, that's unacceptable.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And have you ever received any apology from Army or Pentagon officials for their earlier statements that turned out to be incorrect?

MS. MCGEE: No, no.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: Thank you.

Ms. McNeill, you've testified that at the Army base that you were stationed at in Iraq, your fellow female soldiers experienced painful shocks as soon as your unit moved to the base.

And do you know if KBR employees or Army officials inspected your housing units before you moved in?

MS. MCNEILL: I'm not sure if they inspected them before we moved in.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And did you and your fellow soldiers ever discuss the potential for serious injury or death from these shocks when they occurred?

MS. MCNEILL: Often.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And did you ever report these shocks to the base commanders?

MS. MCNEILL: We reported it to our chain of command and that's where we got it fixed by our soldiers.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And what was the response?

MS. MCNEILL: They said it needed to be grounded and an electrician came over and grounded it.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And you also said that another soldier told you that it would be more efficient, because it took KBR so long to get there, to actually try to fix it yourselves.

Were any of the people that tried to fix it yourselves trained as electricians?

MS. MCNEILL: Yes. We were in a construction engineer unit, so we had electricians and everything like that.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: So did you try to fix it yourself?

MS. MCNEILL: I didn't, no.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: Did other people that weren't KBR officials?

MS. MCNEILL: Yes. Some other soldier from a platoon with electricians came over and fixed it.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: Do you know why it took so long for KBR to come and fix it?

MS. MCNEILL: No.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: Do you feel that KBR took so long to get there because they had other priorities or because they saw that things were more important? I was just listening to Ms. Crawford and I would agree with her, not being an electrician, that anytime you hear that there's a shock and someone isn't severely hurt or killed, that it's a gift, that it's a warning and something that must be immediately responded to.

I know if that would happen in my house with my 13-year-old daughter, that would be the first thing I would do. I'd say, "Get out of that room and then we're going to get it fixed."

Do you think they had other priorities or why wouldn't they see this as an immediate concern?

MS. MCNEILL: I'm not sure. It didn't seem like a big deal. It wasn't -- we were in a combat zone. We didn't look at it as anything less than we would expect. We weren't asking for a lot. So we just didn't shower in it until it was fixed.

But the situation I had discussed about the broken water pipe was submitted when we moved in there and that was then attempted to be fixed by KBR around February 25.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: I think you said in your testimony that in your opinion, this is a quote, "The electrocutions and electrical shocks of soldiers are not just isolated incidents. They are the tip of the iceberg when it comes to lack of responsibility by contractors."

What did you mean by this?

MS. MCNEILL: I've had numerous interactions with contractors while I was overseas and we didn't expect the quality of work that we felt they were being paid to do -- we felt like that you couldn't rely on them.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: Do you have examples of that, other examples?

MS. MCNEILL: I have an example. It's not related to their work with electricity or anything.

But in late March of 2005, I had traveled to a base near Baquba, Camp Cobra, and while we were there doing a project to rebuild a bridge near the base, in our spare time, after some rains had come through, we couldn't work on the project, so the mayor in charge of the base had asked us if we could use some of our equipment to do some small work around the base, such as leveling a parking lot, making ditches to help with the water flow in the area.

And it took us roughly two days of working occasionally to get everything done and the base mayor said that KBR had estimated that it would take six weeks and cost \$40,000 to do.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And you were able to do it in two days just with the employees there.

MS. MCNEILL: Yes.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: What was the attitude with your fellow soldiers about KBR?

MS. MCNEILL: We thought they were overpaid.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And how about the quality of their work?

MS. MCNEILL: We didn't really think it was too high a quality. Some of the things they provided were good, you know, like you got to go get -- you could get four meals a day, you could eat king crab legs, you could do all kinds of things where the extras were concerned, stuff that you didn't need in a combat zone.

But when it came to basic necessities, it was very difficult to get what you needed.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: Thank you very much, Ms. McNeill, for coming forward. And thank you all of you.

SEN. DORGAN: Senator Klobuchar, thank you very much.

Ms. Harris, have you attempted to visit with the contracting company about what happened to your son?

MS. HARRIS: No, I haven't. Attempted to visit with KBR?

SEN. DORGAN: Yes.

MS. HARRIS: No, I haven't. I -- no.

SEN. DORGAN: We have received public explanations from contractors, a number of contractors that have been the subject of hearings.

As I indicated at the start, the largest contract by far, it's just the elephant contract, has gone to Halliburton and Kellogg, Brown and Root.

And so when you talk about that company, it's not as if you're picking that company out. It's because that company got most of the money for contracting.

And the question is: what has it done with that money? What kind of contracting has been accomplished?

And there's so much evidence that there's not -- there's been a substantial amount of waste and abuse especially and in this case and in the case of the hearing that we held a couple of weeks ago, danger to contract employees, contractor employees and to U.S. troops, more than danger, in this case, death.

And let me describe to you what I suppose the contractor would say and, Mr. Bliss and Ms. Crawford, get your response.

They would say that they have the highest quality work. They do everything that is possible to make certain that work is done on time and with good quality, and, besides, it's a war zone and in a war zone, things are kind of tough to complete.

That is a different explanation than two electricians who worked for them who come here and say the work's pretty shoddy. They hire people that aren't experienced. It's probably not surprising, when you hire someone that doesn't even understand the need to ground, that somebody is going to be killed.

I mean, describe to me, how pervasive was it that they were given contracts do electrical

work and then moved those out in subcontracts to people that were not qualified to do it, putting lives at risk?

Ms. Crawford, was that pervasive?

MS. CRAWFORD: I think so, in our area. We had quite a few electricians in the Green Zone, but we had quite a few subcontractors doing -- rewiring the palace.

I don't know -- oh, that was a KBR contract. And then they built -- another contractor built a new DFAC. I'm not sure that was a KBR contract.

I do know that we went in after that contractor actually got arrested for fraud and didn't finish the DFAC. We went in and finished it.

SEN. DORGAN: But the people they were hiring who were not experienced, not enough experience, perhaps not enough training and so on, were they people of such a quality that you would be concerned if they were wiring your home, you'd be concerned of the safety in your home?

MS. CRAWFORD: Yes.

SEN. DORGAN: And did you speak up? Did you tell them, "Wait, there's something wrong here?"

MS. CRAWFORD: Probably not directly in so many words. You just dealt with what you were given. If you were given -- we had Iraqis working for us primarily, because we were at the embassy.

The one Iraqi that I worked with was great. He wasn't a super qualified electrician, but he had a great attitude and he would do whatever I asked and he would do it however I asked.

But the others, that wasn't always the case.

SEN. DORGAN: Mr. Bliss, your impression, were there a lot of third- country nationals out there being hired that just didn't have the capability to do good electrical work?

MR. BLISS: Yes, sir. It was assumed that they were supervised by us. And in Kabul, I had four electricians working for us. One was an interpreter and an electrician and the other three were electricians.

Kind of a PR program, working the local nationals on the base, good idea, kind of an apprenticeship concept, but really not the appropriate place for it, being that we were limited in our materials and maybe some of the talent that Debbie and I feel that was missing.

I think, in a nutshell, personally, what happened is they were given too big of a contract, KBR. They bit off more than they chew. Taking crafts over wasn't necessary.

You could see that if more things were subcontracted out to the specific contractors that do that work -- they were very suited, for instance, for feeding the troops and, all in all, did a pretty good job, in my eyes, from the bases I went to, good meals, sizeable, pretty clean DFACs.

But as far as spreading themselves thin enough to do logistics and warehousing and crafts and feeding and labor, just too much. And if it had been broken down better, there could have been more specialized supervision and oversight.

SEN. DORGAN: You know, I don't understand -- a couple things I don't understand about all this.

I hear testimony, this is the 17th hearing. That's a lot of hours to sit and listen to stories, some of them very tragic.

I don't understand, one, how we hear story after story after story of shoddy work, bad work, waste of money and so on, exposing people to serious injury or death, and yet the contractors continue to get more and more and more contracts.

I don't understand why there's not some accountability office someplace that says the buck stops here, you have to be accountable for what you do.

The second thing I don't understand is the question about -- and I asked Ms. Harris about her relationship with the U.S. Army with respect to answering questions that a loved one has about the death of a son.

I go back to Ms. Lynch, who was celebrated for various things on the battlefield. It turns out she herself indicated that that was substantially ballooned in terms of a story and she wanted nothing to do with it.

Patrick Tillman's parents could not get answers about his death. In fact, the answers they got turned out to be not accurate at all, fabrications, initially.

And discussions -- it seems to me that we celebrate our soldiers and I admire those that are in the field and those in the Pentagon and God bless them for serving our country, but they have a responsibility, as well, and they have a responsibility to reach out to families whose sons and daughters are serving and to be upfront with them, honest with them, work with them, and they ought to be on your side with respect to these issues.

Get to the bottom of it quickly, find out what happened, make sure it doesn't happen again, and make sure people are accountable for mistakes that are made, especially mistakes that end up resulting in the electrocution and the death of soldiers.

So I don't -- this is very troublesome to continue to hear these issues.

This is a different issue than the other issue we've heard. The issue of sloppy and shoddy electrical work, contractors saying that it's not their job, I just don't understand this at all.

I'd say to the two of you, I told Ms. Harris that I lost a 23- year-old daughter some long while ago and I have great difficulty speaking of it. She didn't die in a war zone. She died on a surgical table.

But I can only imagine the strength it takes for you to come and speak publicly of your son's death, even as both of you continue to seek answers, to understand, as a parent, what on earth happened here and how can we make sure this doesn't happen to some other young man or woman, that some parent doesn't get a knock on the door tomorrow night to say that their son or daughter is dead.

So I really appreciate your coming here today and know the strength that it takes to do that.

Senator Cantwell?

SEN. CANTWELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing.

And to elaborate more on your point, thank you, Ms. Crawford, for being here and for being willing to come forward to help show exactly how pervasive this problem is.

And my question is, from an oversight perspective, what more should DOD have been doing to make sure that the contractor was actually doing its job, particularly since we've had several incidents here.

What would have helped in them playing their role and responsibility of hiring a contractor, particularly after one incident occurred, to making sure that new changes were implemented?

MS. CRAWFORD: Just your basic oversight. In the private sector -- I come from the nuke industry -- if we get a work order to go do something and we do it, someone comes in behind us, QA/QC or whoever is the oversight group for that project, to actually verify, hands-on, not just pencil-whipping the paperwork, but actually eyes on, hands on, yes, they've done this work.

We -- I can't give you one instance where my work was ever verified by anyone other than myself.

SEN. CANTWELL: So the Department of Defense had no oversight program to review the work. They had no process by which to see if the work was being done accurately and even after we had incidents of electrocution, they then implemented no process of oversight or investigation.

MS. CRAWFORD: I'm not aware of any program or any organization. The DCMA, but they're evidently understaffed.

But can I expound on that just a little bit?

SEN. CANTWELL: Yes.

MS. CRAWFORD: In the states, we have several oversight organizations when we do work here. We have OSHA, we have the national electrical code and the NFPA. Those are the oversight organizations that we have here.

It's a given. I mean, you don't even wonder what the requirements are. You just know.

Once you leave this country, OSHA doesn't apply anymore. Even if you're a U.S. citizen working for a U.S. contractor on a U.S. project, I worked for three contractors outside the United States, OSHA doesn't apply. The national electrical code doesn't apply.

The labor laws don't apply. Nothing applies. And I think that's a huge problem. It's a huge loophole for these contractors to do work in foreign countries for the U.S. government, spending our tax dollars, and not having to -- they say we implement these, but I've been there firsthand on three different jobs and they do not implement OSHA. They do not implement the NEC.

It's just a big loophole for these contractors and it makes it very, very dangerous for Americans to work on these projects, because they're not protected.

SEN. CANTWELL: And so you would say DOD failed to have any oversight.

MS. CRAWFORD: I think the U.S. government failed all across the board.

SEN. CANTWELL: In not having oversight on this.

MS. CRAWFORD: Yes. State Department, OBO, DOD, everyone.

SEN. CANTWELL: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. DORGAN: Senator Cantwell, thank you very much.

Senator Casey?

SEN. CASEY: Thank you very much. I know we're nearing the end of our hearing.

I just wanted to make note of a couple of things in the testimony.

Cheryl, one of the things that you said in your testimony, which I think hangs over this

whole hearing, is the issue of unanswered questions.

I think that's why virtually everyone in this room is here today, because of that, and there's still a long way to go in terms of the work that the Senate, the House, the administration has to do on this.

I'd say to the administration and I'd say to anyone here who represents them: go back to your office and tell them what you heard here. Look, if the administration is going to be - if Secretary Gates responds to my letter from June 19, where I asked him, among other things, to tell us at what military installations in Iraq have the appropriate inspections and resulting repairs been completed, if he tells us that and he can tell us what corrective action has been taken, and if General Petraeus and others can tell us that they've corrected this problem and prove it, then we're going to have a different conversation here.

But please tell them, if they want a long fight on this and they want to keep having us come back and the people at this witness table come back and fight about this, then we're ready to do that.

But I think if I were working in the Department of Defense, if I were the secretary, if I were working in this administration, I would want this problem corrected right now and I'd want to be able to demonstrate, without question, to the American people that this problem is fixed, that no one will ever lose their life in Iraq this way, whether it's washing a car or taking a shower or whatever else we've talked about today.

So I hope the Defense Department is listening and they've got an abiding obligation here to these families and to the American people.

But if they want to have a long fight about it, we're ready to do that. We're ready to fight and keep fighting.

But, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for having this hearing and for spotlighting this, because this is not an end, but a beginning in terms of some measure of accountability.

Thank you.

SEN. DORGAN: Senator Casey, thank you very much.

Senator Whitehouse?

SEN. WHITEHOUSE: Thank you, Chairman.

I just want to, again, thank you for holding these hearings and just reflect on something that Senator Casey said.

By the time it gets to the point where these hearings are being held, an awful lot of people

have missed the switches along the way within the contractor, within the Department of Defense, within the administration throughout.

It is really, in some respects, very said that it has had to come to this point before something as simple as running legitimate grounded electricity for Americans in Iraq is solved.

And, again, following-up a little further on what Senator Casey said, I'm interested, actually, to know if anybody from the Department of Defense is here or if anybody from KBR is here even to listen.

OK, not one hand went up.

So I'd echo what my friend, Bob Casey, said. Who on earth is not interested in solving this problem? What is the problem? Why are there not a dozen uniforms in this room and a bunch of people from KBR saying, "Hey, we have got to get this right. This is intolerable."

I don't know where they get off getting on the other side of the problem and getting into the cover-up of this, when it's easy to fix.

So I'll close by thanking the witnesses. You've done a very, very important service by being here and I regret very much that it has had to come to this point, but your courage and tenacity in following through to this point is also pretty remarkable.

So I thank the Chairman and I thank the witnesses.

SEN. DORGAN: Senator Klobuchar?

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having this hearing not only today, but all of the work you've done in this area, Senator Dorgan.

And I just wanted to follow-up with just some questions. I know I talked to Ms. McGee and Ms. Harris about the frustration they must have felt, not only with the tragedy, with the frustration that there wasn't enough follow-up by the Army and you weren't getting your questions answered and yet to find out years later about the details.

But, Mr. Bliss, I do thank you and maybe if we'd let you talk early on, if we'd had you here early on and if Ms. Harris and Ms. McGee were able to find out what you knew, it would have been a lot easier for them.

But you were talking about that you witnessed a U.S. soldier get severely shocked from 400 volts of electricity due to improper contracting work by KBR.

And for some of us that aren't electricians, could you tell me what 400 volts of electricity is like, the effect that it has?

MR. BLISS: Actually, it only takes 50 volts to produce what's needed to kill someone. It's a very small amount of current that's needed. It just takes the right conditions, which is why some people get shocked off of shower fixtures or other items and don't die.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: So 50 volts, if you were maybe surrounded by water or something, could kill someone, but 400 volts...

MR. BLISS: That's across the heart.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: How was this soldier injured?

MR. BLISS: He had a hand on a box that had a short circuit fault energizing the entire box structure on the outside. He placed his hand on the other box, which was actually ground, because it's sitting on the ground, and there was enough difference in potential between these two points that one was closer to earth than the other one, which wasn't grounded properly, that should have been grounded, the one with the fault.

And when he placed his hands across them, the electricity chose the path across his chest.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: And so what injury did he incur?

MR. BLISS: No burns. The weight of his vest and his own body falling and collapsing to his knees kind of pulled him off the circuit. But there's so many variables and so many factors in being electrocuted.

They're not very black-and-white and there's not time to go into it. But I think, once again, to reiterate anything I could say today that I believe is the problem is this company was given too big of a contract.

It needed to be more specialized. I saw an attempted oversight in '05 and it just never worked out properly. It was KBR trying to do their own oversight.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: So you're saying -- Ms. McNeill was saying there's this big contract and you're giving -- what was it, crab legs or...

MS. MCNEILL: Yes. King crab legs.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: King crab legs or little bonuses courtesy of KBR they'd advertise because they had all this money, but if it would have been more focused or bid out in a different way, that you think that the work -- there would have been more accountability.

Is that what you're saying?

MR. BLISS: I think the proof of that, ma'am, is that you don't see the other contractors being in the limelight. The one with the largest contract, there's a reason why there's a

problem.

Specializing and breaking the contract down to the appropriate agencies which can do this, but how is it that Halliburton can cook and clean and do warehousing and logistics and flight line and electricity and plumbing and carpentry and whatever you want.

So they needed to break that down and specialize. That way, you could have better oversight.

The most important to KBR at all times was our paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. The QA/QC people were always in our office. They just wanted to take this to the table in front of the Army and say, "See, everything's being done."

And when Mr. McLean (ph) challenged that grounding log in Iraq, they didn't like that. He questioned it, barked up the wrong tree, and was fired for it.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: Why do you believe that KBR was so indifferent to the deaths and the injuries and the shocks and all what Ms. Crawford called the gifts of warnings that we found out?

MR. BLISS: I think it takes a lot of extra effort to properly ground the systems. It's easier to just put wires to something and turn the lights on and everyone's happy.

It does take some extra time, as Debbie was saying, a couple days, in some cases, to appropriately change and fix things. It's a lot easier to just deal with it.

I think that it comes down to money and knowledge and having the qualified people that know how to do it under the varying conditions you might run into in the field and getting them the proper materials that they need to do it. This costs money.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: What I've seen, I'm on the Commerce Committee and when businesses realize that something is going to mess them up with their reputation or a lot of times they feel a moral obligation, they respond immediately.

They don't want to hurt other consumers and they don't want to further erode confidence in there, and that's what I'm trying to figure out and I've come to your conclusion that because it was so big and they had so much and it was hands off and there was no follow-up, that they could just keep going and not make changes that even a normal business that is simply focused on -- let's say their motivation is to make profits and to do well -- would step back and say, "No, this is going to get us in trouble. We have to do something."

But somehow even that business motivation didn't play in here.

MR. BLISS: Maybe because it's a war zone. Maybe they think they cannot be held to the same standards possibly.

SEN. KLOBUCHAR: I think maybe they thought no one would find out, but we're finding out, thank to these mothers.

So thank you very much.

SEN. DORGAN: Senator Klobuchar, thank you very much.

Just a final point. My understanding is that in information just received two weeks ago -- I think Senator Casey referred to it, questions were submitted to General Petraeus.

Two weeks ago, the Foreign Relations Committee received the answers to the questions. The facility in which Staff Sergeant Ryan Maseth was electrocuted, the question was, "Did the Army or Defense Contract Management Agency fund Kellogg, Brown and Root to perform electrical repair work at the RPC complex," that's the complex, "prior to the death of Ryan Maseth?"

The answer by General Petraeus is, "Yes. The Army funded KBR to perform maintenance as a part of the contract modification. The funds were for limited maintenance, to include electrical repairs initiated by the customer service order request."

Question, "Did KBR receive \$3.2 million to repair deficiencies identified in the February 10, 2000 technical inspection report?" General Petraeus answered, "KBR received \$3.2 million pursuant to the contract modification in order to perform the maintenance services."

The most important part of this, however, and I want to ask you about this, the last question that was submitted to General Petraeus, "What measures have the Defense Department and its affiliates taken to ensure proper safety and code enforcement by contractors operating in Iraq, specifically KBR, in eliminating issues of electrical safety hazards since 2003?"

General Petraeus says, and this is submitted two weeks ago, "The Defense Contract Management Agency has directed Kellogg, Brown and Root to implement a theater-wide full technical inspection of all maintained facilities where no prior inspection was performed."

Does General Petraeus' statement that they are going to back to the contractor, a contractor that has been the subject of so many questions about the quality of their work, going back to that contractor to do a theater-wide inspection, does that give confidence and comfort or should it give confidence and comfort to anyone that this is being resolved and taken care of?

Ms. Crawford?

MS. CRAWFORD: It's like the fox watching the henhouse.

SEN. DORGAN: Mr. Bliss?

MR. BLISS: Sir?

SEN. DORGAN: Does that give you comfort that General Petraeus has tasked Kellogg, Brown and Root to go back and do a theater-wide full technical inspection of all maintained facilities?

MR. BLISS: I agree with Ms. Crawford. I don't think it could be done by them properly, not by themselves. It's the fox watching the henhouse.

MS. CRAWFORD: I'm not convinced that they would forward any information that would make them liable, look liable or not competent in -- this is so after the fact. This is stuff that should have been done from the get-go.

SEN. DORGAN: The reason I ask the question is I don't think this has been resolved at all. We've received General Petraeus' answer two weeks ago, but it seems to me the lingering questions about the contractor, in the first instance, ought not persuade General Petraeus to tell us that that same contractor is going to address the problem that exists in the theater.

MS. CRAWFORD: Are they getting paid extra for this inspection of their own deficiencies?

SEN. DORGAN: I don't think contractors in the theater do anything without being paid for. The evidence is that we are shoveling money out by the truckload. Nearly three-quarters of \$1 trillion has been spent since this war began, a substantial amount of it on contracting services.

We have taken a lot of time today to explore a painful and difficult subject, but one I think that's very important.

And let me add my thank you to the thank you my colleagues have offered to all five of you. We appreciate very much.

You, Ms. Crawford, have come from the state of Washington, and Ohio and various places around the country to come and testify. We appreciate the courage to do that that you have exhibited and we think you contribute to the body of knowledge.

What we do, of course, is take all of this testimony and submit it to the Pentagon and have questions of them and we're pushing very hard, we're going to continue to push to try to see if we can solve these problems, and especially with the problems of contracting that have resulted in tragic deaths of American soldiers and others.

We want these things fixed and we don't want other families to experience what you've

experienced.

We thank you very much.

This hearing is adjourned.