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Washington, DC – (November 15, 2004) – The Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, a Congressionally-chartered panel of scientific experts and veterans, has released its first major report on Gulf War illnesses. In response to the report's findings, Secretary of Veterans' Affairs (VA) Anthony J. Principi has announced that VA will no longer fund research studies that focus on stress as the primary cause for Gulf War veterans' illnesses. The report's findings and the Secretary's announcement represent a significant departure from previous government actions on the multisymptom conditions affecting veterans of the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Secretary Principi also committed \$15 million in fiscal year 2005 to support research recommended by the report, including a new program to identify and evaluate treatments for Gulf War veterans' illnesses.

Based on the latest research findings from hundreds of scientific studies and government reports, the Committee concluded that:

- A substantial proportion, 25 to 30 percent, of veterans who served in the 1991 Gulf War suffer from illnesses characterized by persistent headaches, memory problems, pain, fatigue, and other chronic symptoms
- Gulf War illnesses are not explained by stress or psychiatric illness for the large majority of ill veterans
- Ill Gulf War veterans exhibit evidence of neurological problems, including a significant excess in the rate of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig's disease
- Accumulated research supports a probable link between Gulf War illnesses and neurotoxic exposures encountered in the war
- Treatments to improve the health of ill veterans are urgently needed
- Research on Gulf War veterans' illnesses has important implications for current and future military deployments and homeland security

"During the past few years, studies at leading research centers have dramatically increased what is known about Gulf War illnesses and changed long-held beliefs," said James Binns, Research Advisory Committee Chairman. "Past research investments by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense have at last begun to pay off. We are also fortunate to have in Secretary Principi a leader who has taken these conditions seriously and will act on these findings."

Gulf War veterans' illnesses is the name used to describe the chronic health problems reported for over 13 years by veterans who served in the 1991 Gulf War, earlier referred to as "Gulf War Syndrome." Government reports indicate that many Gulf War veterans were exposed to potentially harmful substances during deployment, including a variety of compounds that can adversely affect the nervous system.

The 143-page Committee report summarizes the results of hundreds of scientific studies and government reports. It concludes that recent studies and the large body of available research mandate fundamentally different conclusions than those of previous government panels. The report also indicates that recent discoveries point the way for follow-up research to pinpoint the exact mechanisms underlying Gulf War veterans' illnesses and assist in the development of effective treatments.

"Gulf War illnesses are complex, and are likely the result of a number of factors related to service in the 1991 Gulf War," according to Dr. Lea Steele, the committee's Scientific Director. "Studies consistently indicate that stress and psychiatric illness do not explain the health problems of most ill veterans. In contrast, a growing body of scientific evidence implicates substances to which veterans were exposed during the war, including a variety of neurotoxins. Other exposures may also have contributed to these problems, and will be addressed in future reports."

"Research on Gulf War illnesses has broad implications for current and future military deployments as well as homeland security, given the urgent need for medical defenses against chemical threats" concluded Binns. "A comprehensive effort, marshalling the resources of the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Health and Human Services, as well as private medical research institutions, could produce rapid and much needed results."

For additional information, or to access the report please visit the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses' website at www.va.gov/rac-gwvi.

About the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

The Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses was created by Congress in 1998 and first appointed by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi in January, 2002, to advise VA on research related to the health consequences of service in the 1990-1991 Gulf War. The committee consists of scientific experts and Gulf War veterans, and is chaired by James Binns, former Principal Assistant Secretary of Defense and a Vietnam veteran.