

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

September 17, 2009

Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

We are writing to request a full investigation into the death of Adam Hermanson in Iraq on September 1, 2009. We are extremely concerned about the circumstances surrounding Mr. Hermanson's death, as well as the Department of Defense's (DoD's) inadequate response to this tragedy.

Adam Hermanson served six years in the United States Air Force, completing three tours of duty in Iraq and one in Uzbekistan, before he signed a contract with Triple Canopy in May 2009. According to his family, he was working on a DoD contract supporting U.S. military forces. He returned to Iraq in June, and he served there until his death on September 1st. His body was reportedly discovered on the floor of a shower near his quarters in Camp Olympia, inside Baghdad's Green Zone.

In the wake of his death, Mr. Hermanson's family received misleading information from Triple Canopy. His mother reports that she was initially told that her son died in his bed. However, Mr. Hermanson's wife was told that her husband was found dead in the shower. In addition, the family was repeatedly told that Mr. Hermanson was found with no scratches or marks on his body, though the family later found, and documented through photographs, marks that appear to be burns and wounds. Subsequently, a military medical examiner was reported to have found that Mr. Hermanson had been electrocuted. The family has also stated that a Triple Canopy representative informed them that the company dismantled the electrical wiring in Mr. Hermanson's quarters after his death, hampering any subsequent investigation.

Pentagon spokesman Major Shawn Turner is cited in the media as stating that there is "no indication that U.S. forces will be launching a formal investigation." Although the DoD acknowledged on September 10th that Mr. Hermanson was in fact working on a Pentagon contract, Major Turner went on to state that the death took place at a facility that "does not fall under DoD responsibility." It is disturbing that the Department of Defense apparently wishes to distance itself, now that a fatality has occurred.

We are appalled by the Pentagon's failure to pursue answers to the questions surrounding this tragedy. Since Mr. Hermanson was in Iraq working on a DoD contract, we believe that the Pentagon has a responsibility to fully investigate the circumstances surrounding his death. If it is

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found that he was killed because of any misconduct, negligence, or other abuse, then we believe you must punish the individuals and companies responsible.

Mr. Hermanson is not the first American to die by electrocution in Iraq. Congress began investigating the circumstances surrounding these previous deaths in 2008, focusing on KBR, the company responsible for maintaining much of the electrical wiring in U.S.-run compounds and other facilities. The congressional investigation found that eighteen individuals (sixteen United States military service members and two contractors) had been electrocuted in Iraq, and, according to the recent report by the DoD Inspector General (*Review of Electrocution Deaths in Iraq*, July 24, 2009), ten of those deaths were due to improper electrical grounding or faulty electrical equipment. In the Radwaniyah Palace Complex alone, 30 documented incidents of electric shock occurred in the period through March 5, 2008.

Whether or not KBR had any involvement with the wiring at Camp Olympia, we are extremely concerned by the reaction of both Triple Canopy and the DoD, and we strongly believe that the family of this Air Force veteran deserves real answers about Mr. Hermanson's death. They have, to date, received incomplete and contradictory statements from Triple Canopy. A full Pentagon investigation would not only give them the truth about how Adam Hermanson died, but it could also help to prevent further deaths by electrocution among U.S. military and contractor personnel.

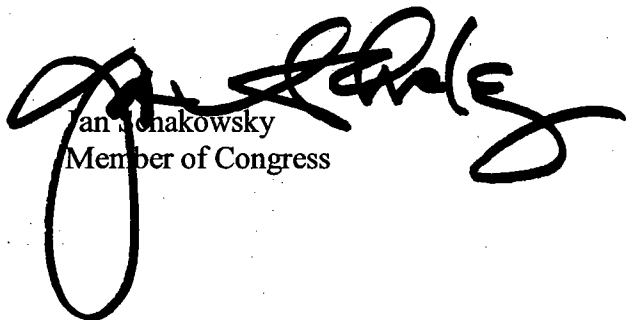
We are aware that the Commander, Multi National Corps – Iraq ordered an Iraq-wide electrical safety review in 2008 by establishing the Task Force for Safety Actions for Fire and Electricity (TF SAFE). In the House Armed Services Committee hearing on April 2, 2009, one of us asked General Petraeus if he was addressing the issue of electrocutions of our soldiers, because, when we send our troops to battle, they should not die in a swimming pool or shower. He replied that TF SAFE was inspecting tens of thousands of structures, but that tens of thousands still remained. In fact, according to the DoD Inspector General's review cited above, by March 19, 2009, TF SAFE found that 53,000 structures needed additional repairs or upgrades, and 14,000 needed re-inspection. Since the review stated that the inspections were scheduled to be completed by September 2009, we ask whether TF SAFE ever inspected the Green Zone facility where Mr. Hermanson's electrocution occurred, and if so, we ask for the results of that inspection, with details about when it was done and by whom, and the state of the electrical work there.

Again, we urge a full investigation into the apparent electrocution of Adam Hermanson. We are extremely concerned that the Department of Defense has stated that it does not believe such an investigation is the Pentagon's responsibility. We urge you to examine the circumstances surrounding his death, as well as allegations that the company misled the family about the causes of Mr. Hermanson's death and the condition of his body. Finally, while war zones are inherently dangerous places, the DoD must take critical steps to ensure that U.S. troops and the contractors employed by the Pentagon do not risk electrocution within their own quarters.


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Thank you for your attention to this very important matter. We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress