

Honorable Senator _____,

Within the last few weeks, the Institute of Medicine released its 2009 update report ¹ to the DVA about the Vietnam War Veterans and Agent Orange. The IOM has made the recommendation that the “Blue Water Navy” Veterans be included in the “presumption of exposure” as there is clear scientific evidence that these members of the Military were subjected to a significant risk to being exposed to Agent Orange and its cohorts while serving in the areas surrounding Vietnam. This report substantiates the scientific evidence that that has been provided the DVA by veterans and other groups for years, yet they have continued, since 2002, to deny these veteran’s claims by using the totally outrageous and scientifically unsupported argument that Agent Orange and its cohorts could not have gone past the physical land borders of Vietnam.

In addition to the IOM update, the Australian Government conducted a study² that resulted in information as to how the Naval Veterans of the Vietnam War were potentially exposed to the dangers of Agent Orange. Their study determined that the shipboard distillation of sea water concentrated the dioxin found in Agent Orange. Based on that study, the Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian Governments now provide benefits to their Vietnam War Veterans that served in the areas surrounding Vietnam.

During the entire eleven years of the Vietnam War, according to VFW there were only 514,300³ service members that served off the coast of Vietnam. It is widely known that a substantial number of those Veterans have died since their service. But looking at the statistics created in 2000, by the DVA ⁴, which indicates that out of the 3.4 million Veterans that received the Vietnam Service Medal, less than 100,000⁵ of these Veterans have applied for benefits under the Original Agent Orange Act of 1991. As a result of those applications, there were only 7,520 Vietnam Veterans receiving compensation for illnesses associated to Agent Orange. If this trend were to continue, as it is expected to, that would mean that there would be only 15,420 additional applications for compensation filed if H.R. 2254 were signed into law.

Senator, I am one of the Vietnam War Veterans that has been affected by the DVA altering the definition of “Service in Vietnam” that was clearly laid out by the Agent Orange Act of 1991. Please review H.R. 2254, as it is a bill in committee in the House that will return these earned benefits back to the Vietnam War Veterans that the DVA suspended in 2002. I respectfully ask that you please exercise your position as one of the leaders within the Senate and show your support to these Veterans by sponsoring a sister bill to H.R. 2254 in the Senate.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Joe L. Covington, Bryan, Texas

¹ IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2009. *Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2008*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12662

² Examination of the Potential Exposure of RAN Personnel to Polychlorinated Dibenzodioxins And Polychlorinated Dibenzofurans Via Drinking Water. http://www.dva.gov.au/aboutDVA/publications/health_research/Documents/dva_nrcet_final_report.pdf

³ Vietnam Warriors - A Statistical Profile

⁴ <http://www1.va.gov/opa/fact/amwars.asp>

⁵ www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Milsvic/Docs/VNFacts.doc