



January 5, 2019

Chairman Mark Takano (CA-41)
420 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Takano:

On behalf of the Sea Service Family, Foundation (SSFF) and our 50,000 supporters and members, we applaud your introduction and support of H.R. 299, The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, which would restore presumptive coverage for exposure to Agent Orange to the Navy Veterans who served in the territorial seas of Vietnam.

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. Military sprayed approximately 20 million gallons of Agent Orange, a powerful herbicide, across the southern half of Vietnam to destroy jungle foliage that concealed enemy personnel and supply routes. The Agent Orange was carried into rivers by soil and plant run-off. The hydraulic plumes from where the rivers met the coast mixed hundreds of miles of coastal water with contaminated river water. To make matters worse, affidavits have indicated that rivers and harbors were also sprayed, contaminating the ocean water even further.

Due to the constant churning of the seabed from U.S. Navy Vessels moving up and down the coast, the Agent Orange would rise to the surface where it would be picked up every time Navy ships converted the salt water in to potable water. A University of Queensland study on the Australian distillation system – the identical system used in U.S. ships – determined that the conversion process enriched the toxic chemical ingredient Tetrachlorodibenzo-p-Dioxin in Agent Orange to an even higher concentration in the filtered water. The contaminated water was then used by a ship's crew for cooking, cleaning, showering, doing laundry, and drinking, effectively giving our Sailors a heavy dosage of Agent Orange during their deployment.

Despite the VAs use of cherry picked data, medical research has concluded that exposure to the dioxin found in Agent Orange can cause numerous health issues including respiratory and blood cancers, prostate cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. According to a report from the Institute of Medicine, individuals with exposure to Agent Orange are also at an increased risk of developing serious heart problems and Parkinson's disease.

Until 2002, presumptive coverage for accessing health care for these side effects was provided to our Blue Water Navy Veterans. However, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) refused to recognize the

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territorial seas as a part of the sovereign territory of Vietnam, and unilaterally decided that it would only provide presumptive coverage to those Servicemembers who served on land or on inland waterways.

This group of Veterans has been ignored and abandoned by the VA and members of Congress for too long. It is time to act on this pressing issue by passing this critical piece of legislation that was supported by 331 cosponsors for H.R. 299, passing the house by unanimous consent, and 52 cosponsors for its companion bill, S. 422, which died on the Senate floor due to two Senators, in the 115th Congress.

The VA has failed our nation's Veterans on this issue, and it is now up to our representatives in Congress to provide the requisite medical coverage by passing this bill. SSFF fervently supports this vital piece of legislation and strongly encourages you to consider the matter with steadfast attention, as these Veterans are dying at astronomical rates, and stalling, only sends more to their grave without benefits.

Thank you for considering such an important issue to the Military and Veteran community which would improve the lives of those who served our great nation. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at 858-926-9903 or at michael@seaservicefamily.com .

Very Respectfully,

Michael Joseph Little
Executive Director / Chairman
Sea Service Family, Foundation