



PRESS RELEASE

Vietnam Veterans of America

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Toxic Exposure Research Legislation Is Needed for Veterans of every Generation

(Wash., D.C.)— On February 10, Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald told Members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs that no legislation on Agent Orange or Toxic exposures is needed. This statement by the DVA Secretary is in line with testimony, delivered before Congress on three occasions in the last eight months, in which the VA claims no research legislation is needed as other Agencies of the Federal Government are doing all of the research studies needed.

John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) responded, “With all due respect to the Secretary, he could not be more wrong. Furthermore, we have yet to receive a list of these research studies referenced in VA testimony which purportedly pertain to veterans and their progeny.”

“The events in the past week highlight the shameless wall of ignorance erected by the VA bureaucrats. Case in point is the Secretary’s recent policy regarding the Blue Water Navy veterans of Vietnam. The policy states that a ‘bright line’ can be drawn across the mouth of a flowing river, with those on the inland side of that imaginary line being ‘exposed,’ and those two feet away, on the harbor side of the line, ‘not exposed,’ ” said Rowan. “Those ‘exposed’ are eligible for presumptive service connection for certain conditions, and therefore medical care and compensation, while those who served two feet away are not. We are leaving our Navy veterans out in the cold, and sadly, many of them have died and their widows have been abandoned.”

“Also on Wednesday, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a report on Gulf War illness, which I find troubling,” noted Rowan. “Psychiatrists/psychologists comprised half of a panel charged with evaluating medical conditions, most probably caused by exposure to toxic chemicals. It comes as no surprise that this recent report ignores the many toxins to which Gulf War veterans were exposed and reverts to the canard that unless ‘causality’ can be proved by a specific toxin, there can be no forward movement. One would hope the VA and DOD would be looking for an ‘association’ of exposure to one or more toxic substances and the presence of adverse medical conditions, rather than placing an emphasis on the ‘mind-body continuums.’ ”

“Yes, technically the VA is able to do what is needed without legislation,” said Rowan. “However, the VA has made its case repeatedly that, in the absence of legislation, there will be no justice accorded veterans with Toxic Wounds, nor for their innocent children and grandchildren. America’s veterans of every generation **DO** need early passage of S. 901 and H.R. 1769, the Toxic Exposures Research Act, and vigorous oversight after enactment to ensure that VA actually does what is mandated in law; we need immediate passage of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015, H.R. 969 and S.681; and we need to push for the extension and expansion of the Agent Orange Act of 1991, to include veterans of recent and future wars, so that a system is in place to systematically review battlefield exposures, and they won’t need to refight the battles we have.”

Vietnam Veterans of America is the nation’s only congressionally chartered veterans’ service organization dedicated to the needs of Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA’s founding principle is “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.”

