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VVA Lambasts the Two Senators and the VA for Killing the “Blue Water Navy” Bill

(Washington, D.C.) -- “Despite the science and despite the support from both Republicans and Democrats in both houses of Congress, obstruction by two Senators, Mike Enzi (R-WY), and Mike Lee (R-UT), the Senate was prevented from voting on *H.R. 299*, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act*,” said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America. “This bill, which would provide a measure of justice to several thousand sailors and Marines who served aboard ships in the waters off the former South Vietnam, had been passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 382-0 and would assuredly have passed in the Senate.

On Monday, December 10, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) brought up the Blue Water Navy bill on the floor of the Senate. When she asked for unanimous consent, it was the senior senator from Wyoming, chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, who objected, citing cost concerns and saying that it would cause “budgetary and operational pressures that would happen at the VA.

“Contrary to the VA’s assertions, in both testimony before Congress and in a letter rife with inaccuracies, confused speculation, and outright lies, from VA Secretary Robert Wilkie to Senator Johnny Isakson, the Georgia Republican who chairs the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs,” said Rowan, “we have the science that shows the pathways of exposure to Agent Orange. The VA’s objections reversed a commitment by Wilkie’s predecessor, Dr. David Shulkin, to ‘do the right thing.’

“It was *déjà vu* all over again, reminiscent of the VA’s actions in February 2002, when it abruptly terminated benefits to Navy, Coast Guard, and FMF Marine veterans, thereby limiting the scope of the *Agent Orange Act of 1991* to only those veterans who could provide proof of ‘boots on the ground.’ The *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act* would right this wrong, and partially restore coverage to those aggrieved veterans who suffer from illnesses considered presumptive to exposure to Agent Orange and other toxic herbicides.

“So, VVA and our colleagues in the other veterans and military service organization will begin this fight for justice all over again when the 116th Congress is seated. And we will do so with renewed vigor,” Rowan added.