



PRESS RELEASE

Vietnam Veterans of America

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Vietnam Veterans of America to Congress: Focus on Military Toxic Exposures

(Washington, D.C.)--“Toxic exposures remain our prime concern,” said VVA National President John Rowan at a hearing today before a joint session of the Senate and House Veterans’ Affairs Committees. He called upon Congress to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Medicine to empanel distinguished scientists and clinicians in the fields of toxicology and environmental hazards to research the literature, hold public hearings, and produce biennial updates of Veterans and Toxic Exposures. This publication would succeed and follow the format of the *Veterans and Agent Orange Updates* mandated by the *Agent Orange Act of 1991*.”

Rowan also expressed the displeasure of Vietnam Veterans of America with the implementation of the *Toxic Exposure Research Act*, enacted on the last day of the 114th Congress. “Now that it has been determined that it is feasible to conduct epidemiological studies on the descendants of veterans who were exposed to toxic substances while in uniform, the VA has the next move,” he said. “Thus far, they haven’t moved with any sense of urgency.” It’s now time for Congress to ask the VA Secretary to explain, under oath, “what he will do to get [his department] on track to execute the provisions of the act.”

Rowan also noted that VVA is “seeking ‘champions’ from both sides of the aisle in both Houses of Congress to enact the *Toxic Wounds Registries Act of 2020*. This legislation would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a master registry that would incorporate *real* registries that are not just mailing lists” for deployments of troops to Southwest as well as Southeast Asia.

“This legislation would authorize the Secretary of the VA to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Medicine to review peer-reviewed scientific research and suggest research on the health effects of the toxic exposures identified in those registries,” he said. “It would require those reviews to inform the Secretary's selection of research to be conducted and/or funded by the VA. It also would establish a presumption of service connection for the purpose of veterans' disability and survivor benefits, for any illness that the Secretary determines warrants such presumption because of a positive association with exposure to a toxin noted in the master registry.”