



PRESS RELEASE

Vietnam Veterans of America

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VVA President Rowan Presents VVA's Legislative Priorities before Congress Calls for Recognition Toxic

(Washington, D.C.) – “From Vietnam to the present-day, members of the U.S. military have been exposed to toxic elements, at home and abroad, that have killed more people than our enemies,” said John Rowan, National President, Vietnam Veterans of America, in testimony March 3 before the Joint Session of House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. “What has made the situation more disgraceful,” noted Rowan, “is our government hid the negative aspect of these toxic substances from everyone serving in these areas and fought their claims with the VA for many years.”

“Toxic exposures, not only to Agent Orange, remain our prime concern,” noted Rowan. “We are seeking champions in Congress to introduce and enact the Toxic Wounds Registries Act of 2021. Toxic Wounds registries would enable epidemiological research by linking, in Electronic Health Records, a veteran’s military history by encoding their location and time of service. VA techs would be able to access the appropriate registry to locate others with whom they served. We call on Congress to ensure this capability is built into the VA’s IT system,” said Rowan.

This legislation would authorize the VA Secretary to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Medicine to review peer-reviewed scientific research, and it would require those conclusions to inform the Secretary’s selection of research to be conducted and/or funded by the VA. It would also establish a presumption of service connection for benefits and healthcare.

This legislation would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a master registry that would incorporate registries for:

- Exposure to Agent Orange during and in the aftermath of the Vietnam War;
- Exposure to toxicants relating to deployment during the 1991 Persian Gulf War;
- Exposure to toxicants from a deployment during Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn, and the Global War on Terror;
- Exposure to toxicants during a deployment to Bosnia, Somalia, or the Philippines; and
- Exposure to toxicants while stationed at a military installation contaminated by toxic substances overseas and/or here in CONUS.

“It is our hope that this legislation will ensure that our most recent veterans will not have to wait 50 years for answers,” said Rowan. “We will continue our battle for justice on behalf of all veterans who are suffering ill health effects due to military toxic exposure and for their children and grandchildren--our fellow veterans whose health has been impacted by their service, for our younger brothers and sisters, the veterans of the Gulf War and those who served Post-911.”

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