

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

31 January 2013

Support Compensation for Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to ask you to cosponsor the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (BWNVVA). In the 112th Congress, the bill gained the bi-partisan support of 126 Members of Congress.

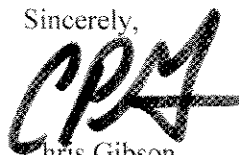
During the Vietnam War, the U.S. Army sprayed 20 million gallons of the herbicide "Agent Orange" to remove jungle foliage from the Vietnam terrain. Agent Orange contains dioxin, a toxic chemical left behind wherever Agent Orange was used or stored. The U.S. Government has since linked dioxin to harmful or serious medical conditions affecting those who served in or around Vietnam, including non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, prostate and other cancers, Type II Diabetes, and Parkinson's disease.

Recognizing the debt owed to veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange, Congress passed, and President George H.W. Bush signed into law, the Agent Orange Act of 1991. The 1991 law empowered the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to declare certain illnesses "presumptive" to exposure to Agent Orange and enabled Vietnam veterans to receive disability compensation for these related conditions. However, in 2002, the VA limited the scope of the Act to only those veterans who could provide orders for "boots on ground" in Vietnam. Boots on the ground encompassed infantry and the riverine navy. As a result, veterans who served in the waters off the coast of Vietnam, commonly called "blue water veterans," were forced to file individual claims with the VA to restore their benefits. The VA has denied 32,880 such claims through 2009.

The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act will extend presumptive coverage to blue water veterans who served up to 12 miles off-shore of Vietnam during 1962-1975. A May 2011 report issued by the Institute of Medicine concluded that plausible routes of exposure to Agent Orange exist for blue water veterans. Presumptive coverage lifts the burden from the individual veteran to prove direct exposure to Agent Orange -- a nearly impossible task due to a lack of record keeping and the inability to know the precise location of dioxins in the air and groundwater runoff -- and extends the same presumption that currently exists for veterans who served on land and inland waterways. It would also reduce the backlogged VA claims by covering certain claims for disability compensation from veterans who are suffering from diseases that the U.S. government has linked to Agent Orange.

It is my sincere hope that you will join me in this effort to provide compensation to our veterans. If you would like more information, or would like to cosponsor, please have your staff contact Dennis Bartow at dennis.bartow@mail.house.gov or 202-225-5614.

Sincerely,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CPA" or "Chris Gibson".

Chris Gibson
Member of Congress