



125 N. West Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

1-800-FRA-1924
703-683-1400
703-549-6610 (fax)

December 18, 2015

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Fax: (202) 225-3393

Dear Speaker Ryan:

The Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) is a congressionally chartered, Veteran Service Organization (VSO) that represents the interest of the Sea Service community (Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard) and their families before the U.S. Congress. We would like to make you aware however, that a certain population segment of Vietnam veterans are not being adequately served by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). From 1964-1975 more than 500,000 service members were deployed off the coast of Vietnam and exposed to Agent Orange, a herbicide used in Vietnam. Past VA policy (1991-2001) allowed service members to file claims if they were awarded and received the Vietnam Service or Vietnam Campaign Medals. In 2001 the Department of Veterans Affairs arbitrarily changed the requirement for presumption to demonstrate that the service member had to have "boots on the ground" to qualify for the VA entitlement and/or benefits from that conflict.

The Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims recently ruled (*Gray v McDonald No. 13-3339*, April 2015) that veterans who served aboard ships in the harbors of Vietnam more than 40 years ago should not be arbitrarily excluded from Agent Orange claims. The Department of Veterans Affairs has chosen not to appeal that decision but unfortunately, has done nothing to implement it either.

Two bills that have been currently working their way through the legislative process will help *right the wrong* by those who served on those afloat ships many years ago. As of today, Congressman Gibson's bill H.R. 969, "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" and Senator Gillibrand's companion bill S.681 have 293 and 34 cosponsors respectively. As evident, there is significant support from both chambers and both sides of the aisle. Many Americans would like to forget about the Vietnam War, but we should never forget those who served or their caretakers! Vietnam Veterans are part of an aging segment of the population and we need to ensure that they are able to receive the proper care and benefits that will make a tremendous difference in the quality of their remaining years of life. I am available to sit down with you and your staff to discuss these concerns after the holiday period.

Sincerely,

THOMAS J. SNEE
National Executive Director
(703) 683-1400 (ext. 101)

TJS:bc:tw

