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September 27, 2016

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

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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 before the U.S. Congress. FRA believes that a contingent of Vietnam veterans is 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 the herbicide, Agent Orange. Past VA policies (1991-2001) authorized service members to file claims if they were awarded the Vietnam Service Medal or Vietnam Campaign Medal. In 2001 the VA arbitrarily changed the requirement for members with "boots on the ground" eligibility while serving in-country to receive benefits and care from Agent Orange exposure.

FRA believes this presumptive issue is a major concern and should be addressed in the omnibus FY 2017 spending bill. Currently there are two "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Acts"; H.R. 969 and S. 681. They were introduced to help make right the wrong, what was committed many years ago to these "blue water" service members. As of today, the House bill has 334 co-sponsors, the most of any other bill in the 114th Congress. In addition, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies appropriations bill (H.R. 4974) passed in the House, and supported by FRA, extends the presumptive service-connection illnesses associated with Agent Orange exposure, to Blue Water Navy, Vietnam veterans.

There is broad support from both chambers and both sides of the aisle. Many Americans want to forget the Vietnam War; but we should never forget those who served! These Veterans are an aging segment of the population and we need to ensure that they are able to receive the proper care and benefits to sustain their quality of life in their remaining years.

Sincerely,

THOMAS J. SNEE
National Executive Director

TJS:jd:tw

