

November 15, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20571

Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the millions of veterans, service members, their families and survivors that our organizations represent, we call on you to immediately add the four pending diseases recommended by the National Academy of Medicine, formerly the Institute of Medicine, to the Agent Orange presumptive disease list.

The National Academy of Medicine's "Veterans and Agent Orange" update published in 2016 concluded that there was compelling evidence for adding bladder cancer and hypothyroid conditions as presumptive diseases. Further, the study clarified that Vietnam veterans with "Parkinson-like symptoms," but without a formal diagnosis of Parkinson's disease, should be considered under the presumption that Parkinson's disease and the veterans' are service connected.

The report noted that although VA has not found hypertension to be presumptively related to service in Vietnam, the committee reaffirmed the conclusions of previous studies that hypertension should be placed in the category of limited or suggestive evidence of association.

The December 2018 National Academy of Medicine report went even further, concluding that there was now sufficient evidence of a relationship between hypertension and Agent Orange and recommended it be added to the presumptive list. However, VA has yet to take any actions on these four presumptive diseases, leaving thousands of veterans waiting.

At a March 2019 congressional hearing, Dr. Richard Stone, Executive in Charge of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) indicated that a decision on these presumptions could be released within 90 days. At a Senate hearing in September, Dr. Patricia Hastings, VA Chief Consultant, Post-Deployment Health, noted that VA leadership, in accordance with Policy 0215, had been actively considering the addition of these diseases since early summer.

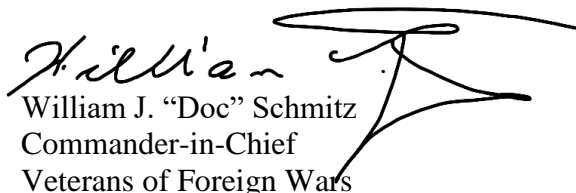
We are especially concerned by the recent release of internal documents that indicate Administration officials challenged the previous Secretary's authority to add these four diseases and may have even impeded action. Even more troubling is the possibility that the Administration is outweighing the cost of adding these diseases over those veterans in need of VA benefits and health care. Three of these pending presumptive diseases have been held up for more than three years, leaving affected veterans, family members and survivors waiting.

Mr. Secretary, the men and women who served in Vietnam were exposed to Agent Orange and far too many have suffered harmful effects scientifically linked to that exposure. We call on you to end the wait by adding bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, "Parkinson-like symptoms" and hypertension to the list of Agent Orange presumptive conditions for disability benefits immediately. Thank you for consideration of this request.

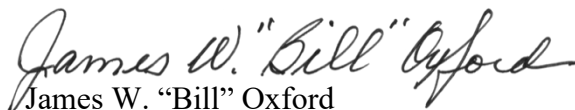
Respectfully,



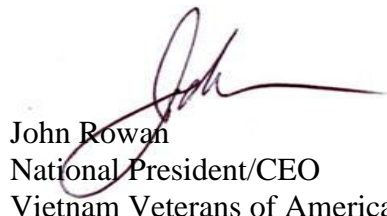
Stephen Whitehead
National Commander
DAV (Disabled American Veterans)



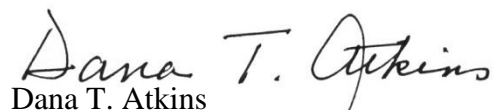
William J. "Doc" Schmitz
Commander-in-Chief
Veterans of Foreign Wars



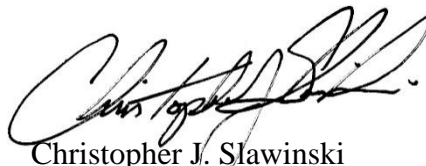
James W. "Bill" Oxford
National Commander
The American Legion



John Rowan
National President/CEO
Vietnam Veterans of America



Dana T. Atkins
Lieutenant General, U.S. Air Force (Ret.)
President
Military Officers Association of America



Christopher J. Slawinski
National Executive Director
Fleet Reserve Association



Carl Blake
Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America



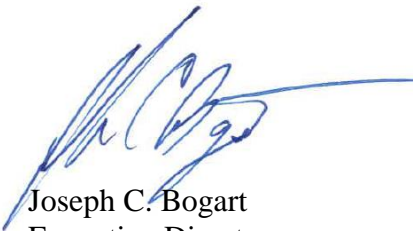
Joseph R. Chenelly
National Executive Director
AMVETS



Felix Garcia
National Commander
Military Order of the Purple Heart



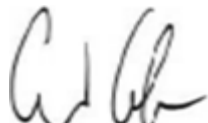
Harvey Weiner
National Commander
Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A



Joseph C. Bogart
Executive Director
Blinded Veterans Association



Danielle Applegate
Vice President
VetsFirst, United Spinal Association



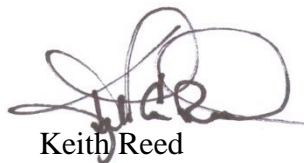
Rear Adm. Christopher W. Cole (USN, Ret.)
Chief Executive Officer
Association of the United States Navy



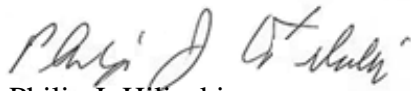
Randy Reid
Executive Director
U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers
Association




CWO Mark Cortor
President
Chief Warrant & Warrant Officers
Association, USCG



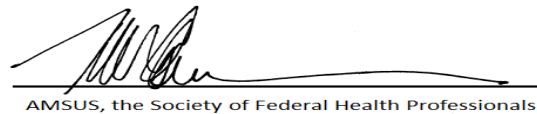
Keith Reed
Executive Director
Air Force Sergeants Association



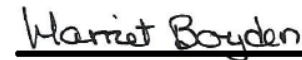
Philip J. Hifinski
National President
TREA: The Enlisted Association



Army Aviation Association of America



AMSUS, the Society of Federal Health Professionals



Gold Star Wives of America

Cc: Chairman Johnny Isakson, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Ranking Member Jon Tester, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Chairman Mark Takano, House Veterans' Affairs Committee
Ranking Member Phil Roe, House Veterans' Affairs Committee