



December 12, 2018

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As leaders of major veterans organizations, and on behalf of our more than 5 million combined members, we respectfully ask for your personal leadership to help Congress pass critical legislation to correct a long overdue injustice harming tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans.

Knowing of your strong personal support for the men and women who served, particularly for the Vietnam generation, we are asking you to use your influence to get the Senate to pass the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018. This important legislation is supported by all major veterans organizations, passed the House unanimously by a vote of 382 to 0; and is strongly supported by an overwhelming bipartisan majority of Senators, including Senate Veterans Affairs' Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson.

Unfortunately, due to Senate rules, opposition by just a couple of Senators – in this case Senators Mike Enzi of Wyoming and Mike Lee of Utah – is thwarting the will of the vast majority who would support and vote for Blue Water Navy legislation, if given the opportunity. Regrettably, Monday night, Senators Enzi and Lee objected to a request to pass this legislation; and unless they drop their opposition to allowing a vote, the bill will die when Congress adjourns at the end of the year, and we'll have to restart this fight all over again. That will mean thousands of aging and ill Vietnam veterans will continue waiting for their just benefits; some will not live to see that day.

We understand there is concern about the cost to provide benefits and health care to Blue Water Navy veterans suffering from cancers and other illnesses linked to Agent Orange. But when our nation asks its brave men and women to serve in harm's way, America assumes a sacred obligation to care and compensate for the injuries and illnesses they suffer during that service.

Some have argued that Congress should continue waiting until there is more "scientific" evidence. However numerous studies by the Centers for Disease Control, the National Academy of Medicine and others have already found that there is no scientific basis to exclude Blue Water Navy veterans from benefits linked to Agent Orange exposure.

When the Agent Orange Act of 1991 was passed, all 2.7 million veterans who served in Vietnam – including those who served off shore – were included. In fact, VA originally defined "service in Vietnam" to specifically include, "service in the waters offshore." That was Congress' clear intention when it passed the law and that's how it was implemented by VA. However, in 2002, based on an erroneous review of unrelated law, VA suddenly added a new requirement that a veteran must have actually put "boots on the ground" in Vietnam to get the benefits of the Agent Orange presumption. This change ignored the evidence that Agent Orange was heavily used on and near the coast, drifted offshore and could also be ingested through the water on ships.