

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 10, 2019

Thomas B. Modly
Acting Secretary of the Navy
2000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Acting Secretary Modly,

We write today to encourage your attention at the highest level on the Navy's involvement in determining the eligibility of veterans who served aboard submarines for benefits under the Blue Water Vietnam Veterans Act (PL 116-23), which will go into effect on January 1, 2020.

In the report accompanying H.R. 299, the intent of Congress with regard to submarine veterans under this now-law was clear: "This bill contemplates coverage of all vessels that served on or below the offshore waters of Vietnam."

We were encouraged by the testimony of Under Secretary for Field Operations at the Veterans Benefit Administration, Mr. Willie Clark, at an October 30th House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing that the VA plans to conduct additional research to confirm eligibility for submarine veterans. We are concerned, however, that the process is not moving quickly enough to align with the January 1st implementation, particularly for those affected veterans experiencing life-threatening, debilitating illnesses as a result of exposure to chemicals commonly known as Agent Orange.

It appears that while many of our Blue Water Vietnam veterans will be able to benefit from the law beginning on January 1st, resolution will not be as timely for submarine veterans, who will have to wait weeks and perhaps months longer for the VA to adjudicate their cases despite the clear intent discussed above. Blue Water Vietnam veterans have waited long enough for resolution of this issue, and, while we understand the additional burden posed by confirming eligibility for submarine veterans of Vietnam, those individuals should not have to continue to wait to receive the care they deserve.

Therefore, we strongly urge the Navy to continue to provide its full attention and support to the VA so it can to help confirm eligibility for these submarine veterans, to include locations of submarines or simply confirmation that they operated within 12 nm as outlined in PL 116-23, so these veterans can receive benefits on parity with their surface Navy brethren.

We request that you provide a plan to us within 30 days of receipt of this correspondence. We look forward to your response and continuing our work on behalf of all veterans.

Sincerely,


JOE COURTNEY

Member of Congress


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL

United States Senate


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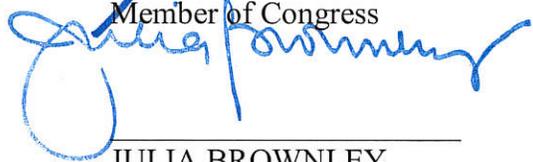
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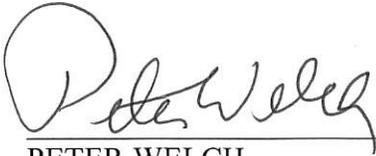
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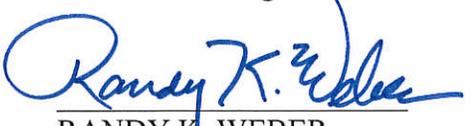
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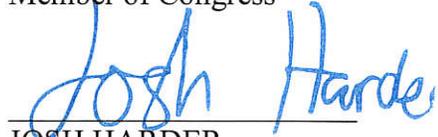

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