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U.S. House of Representatives**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515

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DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

October 1, 2018

The Honorable Johnny Isakson, Chairman
 Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs
 United States Senate
 412 Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Isakson:

We are writing to request that HR 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018 that passed the House on June 25, 2018 by a unanimous vote of 382-0, be cleared by the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and brought to the Senate floor as soon as possible so that the 40-year wait for fair compensation by the nation's Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans -- many very sick and in pain -- might finally end.

It is a very sad reality that every day of delay means there are fewer Blue Water Navy veterans who earned and deserved compensation and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care for their illnesses. In just a few months, as the House considered the bill this Congress, at one point the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reduced the cost of implementation of HR 299 from \$1.2 Billion to \$880 Million because the population of eligible veterans is dying.

As veterans' advocates we have all heard from frustrated veterans who say it sometimes looks to them as if the Congress and the VA are denying benefits just waiting for them to die. Unless Congress passes this bill, it will be hard to argue against that notion.

HR 299 passed the House unanimously after months of consideration and discussion. It was a day many thought would never come. Finding over a billion dollars in the Federal budget that could be redirected is not an easy task. Many thought it was impossible. Yet the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman, Dr. Phil Roe and the Ranking Minority Member Tim Walz built a coalition of support in Congress and together with the Veteran Service Organizations found a way. It is his number one legislative priority, the Chairman said many times.

HR 299 is an example of what we can accomplish when we work together in a bipartisan manner. The VA did not support adding presumptions for Blue Water Navy veterans as it

worked its way through the House. VA will continue to object and try to find roadblocks. It is the Congress' job to say enough is enough.


We respectfully ask that the way be cleared for full Senate consideration.

It appears as if exposure to toxins by American servicemembers in theaters of war will always be a reality. As Members of Congress our task for the future will be to take the lessons learned from the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam so many decades ago, and find ways to forthrightly acknowledge the exposure, determine the service connection and then compensate servicemembers in far less than two generations. When we do, we can dedicate this work to the Vietnam era veterans who died waiting for their recognition.

Sincerely,

















Adrian

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