

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 12, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

For far too long, your Administration has stonewalled extending critical benefits to gravely ill veterans whose service in Vietnam exposed them to Agent Orange. As a result, these veterans suffer from Bladder Cancer, Hypothyroidism, Parkinsonism, and Hypertension – health conditions that each meet the historical standard for being added to the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) presumptive list for service-connection as it relates to Agent Orange exposure. Your Administration’s refusal to add these conditions to the presumptive list continues to deny more than 190,000 sick and aging veterans the health care and compensation they have earned and desperately need. More than fifty years after their service and sacrifice, these veterans continue to suffer the detrimental effects of their exposure each day. These heroes deserve more than inaction and indecision from their own government – they deserve justice.

Previous letters to your Administration on this specific topic have gone unanswered. To date, these veterans have yet to receive a justification for why the Administration has failed to act or an expected timeline for action. At best, the answers provided by Administration officials have been inconsistent. At worst, they have been misleading. It took a Freedom of Information Act request to confirm that the former VA Secretary David Shulkin pushed the White House to add new health conditions to the presumptive list, and that the proposal was blocked by the White House and the Office of Management and Budget due to costs. It is unfortunate that an Administration seemingly eager to send more servicemembers into combat, refuses to consider the consequences that extend beyond the battlefield. It is well past time for your Administration to acknowledge the considerable effects service has on one’s health, and accept that Agent Orange exposure is most certainly a cost of war.

Instead of justice, these Vietnam Veterans have been subject to additional and unwarranted delays and calls for further evaluation of scientific research that has already been reviewed by the National Academies of Medicine (NAM). In NAM’s March 10, 2016 report, Hypothyroidism and Bladder Cancer were found to have “limited or suggestive evidence of an association” to Agent Orange exposure. This same report expanded the definition of Parkinson’s disease, which was in the “limited or suggestive evidence of an association” category, to include Parkinson-like symptoms or Parkinsonism. Finally, NAM’s November 15, 2018 report showed “sufficient evidence of an association” for Hypertension to Agent Orange. “Limited or

suggestive evidence of an association” has historically been sufficient for VA to grant presumptive authority for other conditions, and there has never been a condition in the “sufficient evidence of an association” category which was not included on VA’s presumptive list.

Unfortunately, your Administration recently squandered another opportunity to right a wrong and explain your plans to deliver care and benefits to Vietnam Veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Instead, in a report required by Congress in the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations bill you signed in December, the VA questioned the value of the scientific evidence from the NAM. NAM’s reports have been the standard for scientific evidence of association for more than twenty years. But it is now clear that your Administration is intent on changing the rules at the eleventh hour and forcing veterans with Bladder Cancer, Hypothyroidism, Parkinsonism, and Hypertension to meet a different—perhaps unattainable—standard. That is unacceptable.

Mr. President, it is time to end the wait for the more than approximately 190,000 frustrated and desperate veterans who are currently living with and dying from these health conditions. It would be consistent with how previous Administrations have acted, and it is simply the right thing to do for them and their families.

Sincerely,



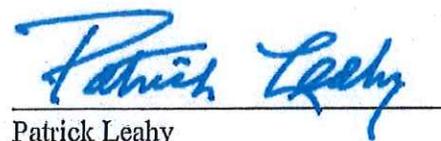
Jon Tester
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



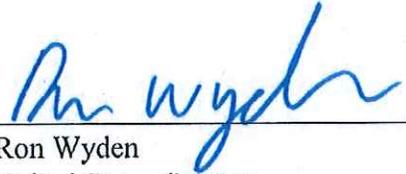
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



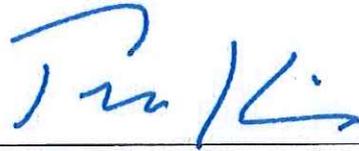
Bob Menendez
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



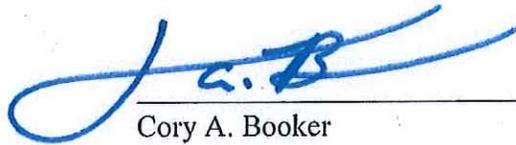
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



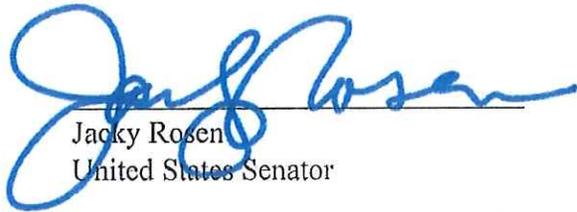
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



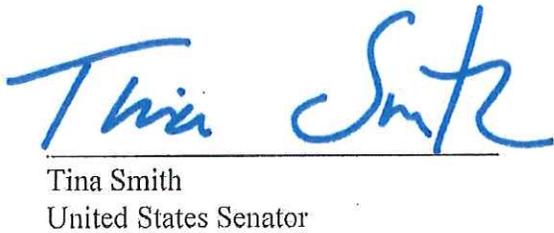
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



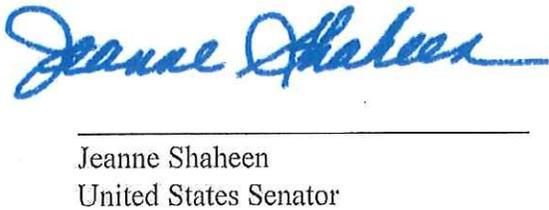
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



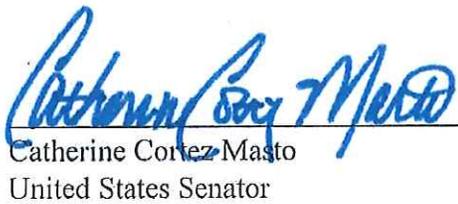
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



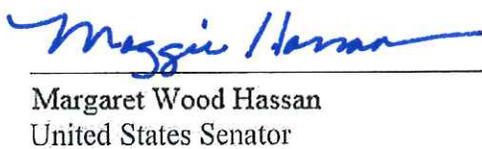
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



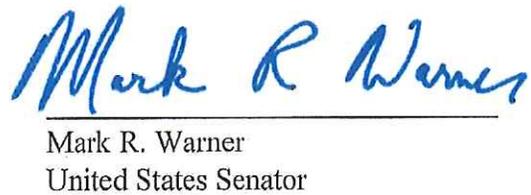
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



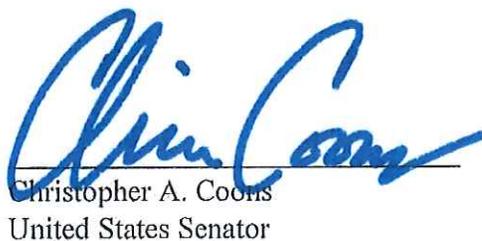
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



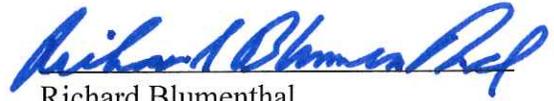
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



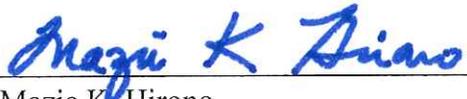
Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



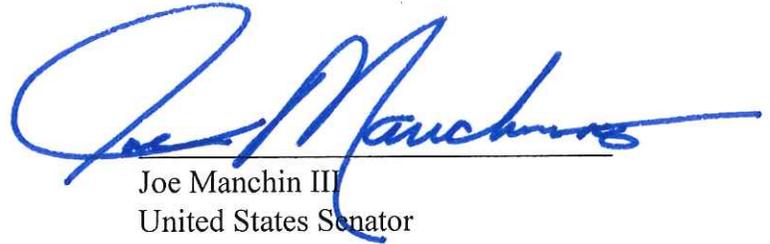
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



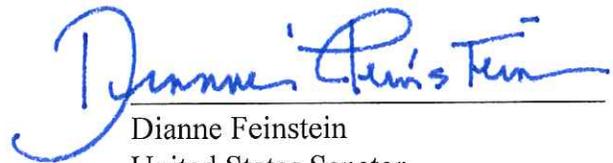
Tom Udall
United States Senator



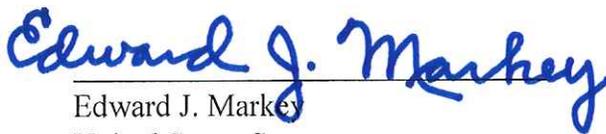
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



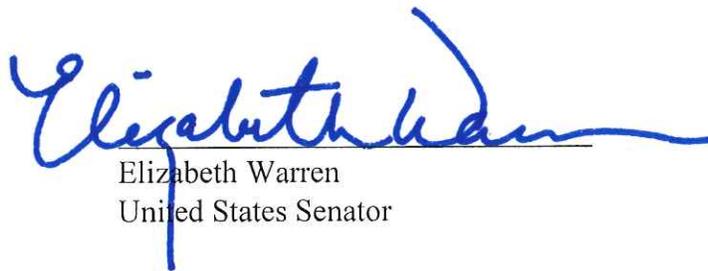
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Jack Reed

Jack Reed

United States Senator