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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 6, 2018

The Honorable David A. Shulkin
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

I write to reiterate my September 22, 2017, request that the Department of Veterans Affairs review the connection between Agent Orange and Bladder Cancer, Hyperthyroidism and Parkinsonism. In response to my letter, you noted that you intended to issue a decision on the National Academy of Medicine's (NAM) classification of these diseases by November 1, 2017. That decision has still not been made and veterans nationwide continue to suffer as a result.

For example, recently a Montanan contacted me regarding his father's diagnosis of Parkinsonism, also known as atypical Parkinson's disease, Parkinson's plus or Parkinson-like syndrome, which severely affects his health and quality of life. While Parkinson's disease is already presumptively service-connected, Parkinsonism is not. VA's reluctance to issue a decision on the presumptive status of this is troubling given the NAM's March 2016 release of *Veterans and Agent Orange, Update 2014*. In this report, the NAM found limited or suggestive evidence of an association between Parkinson's disease (PD), including Parkinsonism, and herbicide exposure. The NAM states that there is "no rational basis for an exclusion of those with Parkinson-like symptoms from the service-related category denoted as Parkinson disease". Given this statement, I find it concerning that VA continues fail to issue a favorable decision on this disease.

The NAM further clarifies that it should be left to VA to determine that a veteran's Parkinson-like symptoms have some other cause other than a service-related exposure, rather than the veteran having to prove that his or her symptoms are due to a service-related exposure. This would take the burden off of the shoulders of veterans already struggling with a debilitating medical condition. I wholeheartedly agree with this recommendation.

Not including Parkinsonism as a presumptive condition for veterans who honorably served our country is leaving many veterans without the care that they need and deserve. I urge VA to review the March 2016 Agent Orange Update with this in mind. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester
Ranking Member