

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 15, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

While the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 allows for VA to stay claims affected by the law, we have concerns with the Department's plans to provide timely benefits to Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans and Korean DMZ Veterans. Furthermore, we have questions about how the VA is communicating with veterans regarding the impact of this law, how implementation will be handled moving forward, and how VA is addressing confusion from veterans about what steps need to be taken to ensure they receive their benefits.

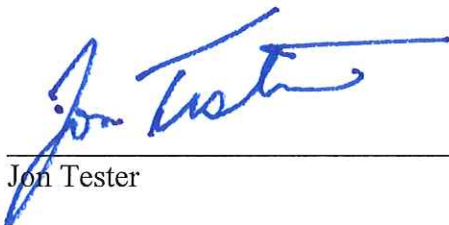
Although the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act does not go into effect until January 1, 2020, Blue Water Navy Veterans who served within Vietnam's territorial waters are currently eligible for benefits due to the recent *Procopio v Wilkie* ruling. Therefore, we urge VA to make every effort to provide timely benefits and healthcare to this aging population of veterans with as much urgency as possible. Issuing a stay on the resolution of all benefits decisions will only needlessly delay the delivery of critical health care and contribute to an influx of claims that could be more appropriately managed if processors could begin their work now.

In order to provide veterans the quickest possible path to benefits, in consultation with the Department of Defense, VA should publicly identify ships, on a rolling basis, which sailed within the area defined in the new law and therefore provide veterans with a presumption of service-connection. This list should include dates when each ship fulfilled the criteria delineated in law, and a process through which veterans and veterans service organizations could provide evidence as to whether additional vessels should be added to the list.

In terms of the VA's implementation plan, we would like additional information that justifies the decision to implement the stay on claims. Further, we request additional information on the required steps that must be taken to identify affected veterans, and regarding the process through which the delivery of benefits is carried out in a timely and accurate manner.

Moving forward, we urge you to be proactive in your communication with veterans and with Congress as we continue to provide oversight over this important issue. And if it is determined that additional authorities or resources are required at any point in this process, we hope you will let us know.

Sincerely,



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Jon Tester



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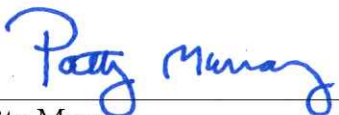
Sherrod Brown



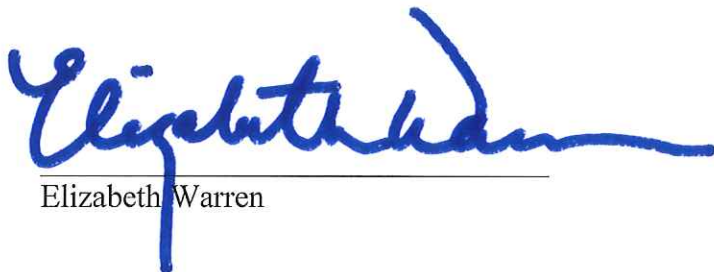
Richard Blumenthal



Mazie K. Hirono



Patty Murray



Elizabeth Warren



Brian Schatz



Robert P. Casey Jr.



Gary Peters



Bernard Sanders



Joe Manchin III