

United States Senate

May 13, 2015


Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and Members of the Committee:

I want to thank the Veteran's Affairs Committee for holding this important hearing today on the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015, and I want to thank Senator Kirsten Gillibrand for her hard work on this issue. As the son of a Marine, I know firsthand the importance of keeping the promises made to our servicemen and women. The legislation discussed today is timely and important in holding ourselves accountable to the members of our military while they are active duty and long after they have retired from active duty.

Approximately 20 million gallons of Agent Orange were sprayed in Vietnam to remove jungle foliage during the Vietnam War. The toxic chemical had devastating effects for millions of those who served in Vietnam. Twenty-four years ago, back in 1991, Congress passed a law requiring Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide presumptive coverage to Vietnam veterans with illnesses that the Institute of Medicine had linked directly to Agent Orange exposure. Then in 2002, the VA changed that policy to only cover veterans that had orders for "boots on the ground" during the Vietnam War. This has led to the exclusion of thousands of sailors who were exposed to Agent Orange offshore but are not receiving VA benefits.

Our veterans don't deserve sub-par care. It is unacceptable that a technicality in the law and dysfunctional federal bureaucracy has resulted in the prolonged suffering of thousands of our nation's heroes. This legislation will ensure that victims of Agent Orange-related disease receive the care and compensation they have long deserved. I will fight every day for our veterans, just as they have fought for us.

I hope that shining a light on this issue will renew the efforts by veteran advocates to make sure that these brave veterans receive the benefits they deserve.

Sincerely,


Steve Daines

US Senator