

**Testimony of:
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Good Morning,

My name is Jerry Ensminger, I served faithfully in the United States Marine Corps for nearly a quarter of a century. Of my four children, who were all born during my military career, my daughter Janey was the only one to have been conceived, carried, or born while we lived aboard Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, NC during the years of contaminated water. When Janey was six (6) years old she was diagnosed with Leukemia, she fought a valiant battle against her disease but she eventually lost the war, she passed away on 24 September 1985 at the age of nine (9). That is correct, the 30th anniversary of her death was just five (5) short, painful days ago. Janey is but one example of the multitude of tragedies suffered by former Camp Lejeune families who were exposed by this negligence.

It wasn't until August of 1997 that I became aware of the contaminated tap water aboard Camp Lejeune. The Department of the Navy (DON) and the United States Marine Corps did their very best to conceal the truth, but eventually that genie escaped it's bottle. At first, the DON/USMC reported that the contamination had reach only a few of the base's water supply wells and they had immediately taken those wells off-line, there was absolutely no mention that the contaminants had reached our taps. When that fact was eventually revealed, authorities with the DON/USMC publicly described the levels of contaminants we were exposed to as

“minute,” “trace,” “small,” or “miniscule.” Many years later when the truth was finally revealed, Camp Lejeune’s contaminated tap water is now known as the worst and largest tap water contamination incident of a major water system in the history of our nation. I would say that that is a far cry from our leaders description of the contaminant levels as **“minute,” “trace,” “small,” or “miniscule,”** don’t you agree?

Mr. Chairman, I will now address my years of experiences with the Veterans’ Administration (VA) concerning the Camp Lejeune contamination issue. I would like to preface my detailed comments with this one statement which I feel capsulates the VA/Camp Lejeune saga. **“Agents within the VA system have expended more effort, time, and money devising methods to deny Camp Lejeune victims their rightful benefits rather than providing them!”** During our April 2010 Camp Lejeune, Community Assistance Panel (CAP) meeting Mr. Brad Flohr of the VBA described in great detail the VA claims process which Camp Lejeune veterans needed to follow when submitting a claim for service connected benefits. (court recorded transcript is available at www.atsdr.cdc.gov Camp Lejeune page).

In 2013 the VA changed the rules and the requirements for Camp Lejeune claims. They had created an entire new step in the adjudication process **for Camp Lejeune claims only**. This new step was called **“Subject Matter Experts” (SMEs)** who were selected from existing VA medical staff. These so-called SMEs were neither scientifically or medically qualified to make the judgments or evaluations their VA handlers were tasking them to make. The fact that the VA has veered out of their lane of providing healthcare and benefits and into areas of expertise of which they have no business venturing, raises some very troubling questions for me. First and foremost, what is the motivation for VA staff in their incessant pursuit in denying veterans’ their benefits? Most of

the VA staff involved in this VA/Lejeune debacle are or were retired military medical officers and their actions exhibit an almost maniacal desire to deny their fellow veterans their benefits. Secondly, we need to determine if a congressionally approved standardized VA claims process exists which veterans can confidently follow when making a claim. Apparently, the current policy allows the VA to modify the claims process at their whim without congressional oversight. This allows the VA to create insurmountable obstacles in the claims process for which most veterans don't have the knowledge or finances to overcome. In layman's terms this amounts to authorizing a sports team to change the rules at anytime they desire, even during a game. How could anyone be successful in such a scenerio? They Can't! For example, I have witnessed many Camp Lejeune veterans' claims where these so-called VA SMEs completely ignored and even challenged the the veterans' attending oncologists or other medical specialists! Thirdly Mr. Chairman, in light of the VA's Camp Lejeune SME fiasco, with their demonstrated desire to rely on outdated science and their refusal to recognize and utilize the most up to date scientific studies available, I must personally oppose the bill S.901. In it's current form, S.901 would not only be dangerous to the welfare of our veterans and their families, it would create a conflict of interest and a duplication of efforts which other existing governmental agencies are tasked, staffed and equipped to perform. I would be in favor of a modified S.901 which would mandate one or a combination of these existing agencies to perform the tasks outlined in this bill.

In closing Mr. Chairman, no other military toxic exposure incident in our history has been documented nor studied as thoroughly as Camp Lejeune. Much of the science is already in and more is coming in future study reports. Many Camp Lejeune veterans and their families have waited, suffered, and yes even died waiting for this scientific evidence, they shouldn't need to wait any longer for

the help they deserve. We were all at Camp Lejeune to serve and protect our nation, none of us ever expected nor deserved to be poisoned...especially here on our own shores! Thank you.