

CHRIS GIBSON

19th District, New York

1708 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-5614

<http://gibson.house.gov>



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 13, 2015

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

Subcommittee on Tactical Air and
Land Forces

Subcommittee on Readiness

HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

Subcommittee on Conservation
and Forestry

Subcommittee on Biotechnology,
Horticulture, and Research

HOUSE SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Subcommittee on Agriculture, Energy
and Trade

Subcommittee on Contracting and
Workforce

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, distinguished Members of the Committee, and Witnesses,

Thank you all very much for taking an important step forward in addressing a grave injustice that has affected members of the United States military who were exposed to the known carcinogen and harmful chemical, Agent Orange.

Members of the military, especially thousands in the Navy and Marine Corps, distinguished themselves and their country in combat and support operations off of the coast of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. While the U.S. was spraying the defoliant Agent Orange, these men and women were exposed to it through water purification processes, air currents, and other potential avenues for exposure. Fortunately, the Congress rightfully acted to grant them presumptive coverage for this exposure in 1991. Unfortunately, in 2002, while attempting to clarify who should be covered, the Department of Veterans Affairs unjustly made a determination to restrict such presumptive coverage to those who served on land and inland waterways. This was contrary to scientific findings, congressional intent, and the recognized definition of a country as including its territorial seas.

I am proud to have worked with hundreds of veterans, veterans families, Veterans Service Organizations, and Members of Congress to seek to right this wrong with a simple modification to the law to ensure that those who served in the territorial seas and harbors would be covered. I would especially like to thank Blue Water Navy Veteran widow Carol Olszanecki and Susie Belanger, two tireless constituent advocates. Senators Gillibrand, Daines, and the other cosponsors have been dedicated advocates, and I am proud to say we have over half of the United States House of Representatives on my identical companion bill, H.R. 969.

I thank you all again and look forward to reviewing what this Committee discusses on this important legislation. I also look forward to getting this bill signed into law and bringing justice to thousands of our Vietnam Veterans who, for over 10 years, have been forgotten. I stand ready to assist in anyway.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CPG', written over a blue horizontal line.

Chris Gibson
Member of Congress