**BLUE WATER NAVY TESTIMONY, SVAC, August 1, 2018**

**Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Sanders, committee members, thank you, on behalf of all our Veterans for your leadership and caring spirit. I am Tom Snee, the National Executive Director for the Fleet Reserve Association, the oldest Sea Service Association, serving our men and women in the United States Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard since 1924. We are most *honored and pleased* to have been asked to return once again, to express and share our updated views in the hope for the Senate’s favorable VOTE of HR-299, on behalf of the Blue Water Navy Veterans. I am also a retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, Surface Warfare, with over 30 years of active duty, and a Vietnam Veteran, who proudly served on a Blue Water Navy ship that was exposed to the Agent Orange herbicides, in the coastal waters off Vietnam. Like other ships, we too have lost a great number of our crew, due to Agent Orange. Today, I’m here to put a ‘human face’ on the Agent Orange victims and their families. Simply, HR-299 will protect and ensure the poignant care for *ALL* Blue Water Navy Veterans from the actions we make today.**

**Mr. Chairman, before I start, please allow me to read a quote from President George Washington in order to place our ideas in perspective for this afternoon.**

***"The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of earlier wars, on how they were treated and appreciated by our nation."***

**Mr. Chairman, every day we delay the well-being of earned benefits, quality treatments and life’s sustainability for our Blue Water Navy Veterans, we are losing their confidence and creditability as a nation. Through despair, addictions, homelessness, and suicides, our aging Vietnam Veterans’ population, can only wonder and frequently ask, “*Do they really care*?” For me, as that young 19 year old from northeast Ohio, I never knew we were at war until I reported aboard my first ship heading to Vietnam. This however, I did not sway my commitment to the enlistment oath I took, “*to protect and defend the Constitution of* *the United States*”. We can all agree on one thing, that the Vietnam era was a very unpopular and emotional time back then. I, however, chose to serve towards a more deliberate and positive course for our country and invest in its national interest and securities.**

**The House recently and overwhelmingly, voted 382-0, for HR-299. On that day, Veterans across this nation lit up phones lines, social media resources, in the hope and trust that they were finally realized and valued for their service. Today, this committee and the Senate can further seal that confidence to secure those “mandates” for care and attention. For years we have been told, NO. Our Australian counterparts and allies, with the same at-sea lifestyles, experienced the same anguish however initiated the means to provide the needed care for their Vietnam sea-service Veterans.**

**The VA Mission Act of 2018, sponsored *appreciatively* by Chairman Roe, will “ensure a continuity of care and services” for our Blue Water Navy Veterans. Please consider these and other points in the following:**

* **Measurable Blue Water Navy issues have been addressed and produced to both the House and Senate.**
* **An identifiable and affordable ‘pay-for’ has been established.**
* **The VA Mission Act of 2018 provides the needed assurances, of hope, promise of care and sustainability in their personal lives!**
* **The VA Report of 2008, (Chapter 10) can be qualitatively referenced: *“Given the available evidence, the committee recommends that members of the Blue Water Navy should not be excluded from the set of Vietnam-era veterans with presumed herbicide exposure(s).”***
* **A letter sent and signed by 14 Senators in January 2016, stated; “*There seems to be ample reason for you (VA Secy) to make the policy decision in favor of the many veterans who are suffering from painful and debilitating diseases, and for whom justice is long overdue.”***
* **Even the statement on dioxins regarding Agent Orange brings the point home, as quoted:**

**“Dioxins are in nature, chemical residues from manufacturing processes and are often cancerous. Typically, the side effects of dioxins in human exposure include Sarcoma, lymphoma (of various types), Blood diseases and various birth anomalies and defects of varying magnitudes of seriousness.”**

* **Recently, the VA established a qualitative framework to put into practice a positive stance and five courses of actions that would support and endorse a decrease in suicide instances to match the needs for our Veterans.**

**All of these present a positive momentum on behalf of the Blue Water Navy Veteran. Mr. Chairman, Committee members the time is NOW, to legislatively forge “affirmative action for our Blue Water Navy Vets”! Every day we suspend this passage, again, we further a continual loss of confidence, and psychological setbacks for our veterans including death itself. I, like many here on this panel, have received countless calls, letters, emails from friends, made visits to crisis centers, to comfort, a Blue Water Navy Veteran and his family, because “I CARE”. One widow of a Navy Master Chief Boiler man at Arlington Cemetery told me, “It is cheaper for the VA to bury our Veterans, then to take care of them which should have never been excluded.” The seas and air waves were full of the Agent Orange herbicides. The making of fresh water is a universal process on every Navy ship. Recently I had the privilege to speak with Ann and Jim Zumwalt, children of ADM Elmo Zumwalt. She told me that if her dad had known the follow-on effects from Agent Orange, he would have never allowed it.**

**In closing, Mr. Chairman, these are the ‘faces’ and stories of many Blue Water Vets. We took an oath, we served, and we made a commitment to the sea, breathing, bathing, drinking, cleaning, brushing our teeth, while absorbing Agent Orange. Our caretakers are suffering as well, patiently and wondering, ‘just when that day will come’. Sir, people are not ‘science projects’; we are the consequences of an era gone by. VOTE for HR 299. Please remember my earlier quote by George Washington. This could have an impact on future personnel readiness. In remembering the Vietnam Veteran, “our resistance will be long and painful.” Sir, we have the means; let’s make sure this does not happen.**

**Mr. Chairman, I thank you, the Ranking member and all of the committee members here today. I respectfully request that my oral statement be placed in the record and I await your questions.**