



Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Association
7065 W Ann Rd #130651
Las Vegas, NV 89130

September 17, 2018

Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman;

The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Association is a non-profit tax-exempt group organized under Section 501[c][3] of the Internal Revenue Code. We assist and advice Veterans on current legislation, right now focusing on the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act.

I am writing to you in response to Secretary Wilkie's letter of September 6, 2018 concerning H.R.299. This letter along with the testimony of Under Secretary Paul Lawrence on August 1, 2018 before the Senate Veterans Affairs concerning the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (H.R.299) goes against the Mission Statement and Core Values of the Veteran Affairs Committee, which I will place at the end of this letter (this was taken off their Website).

The **Mission Statement** is as follows:

To fulfill President Lincoln's promise "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.

This is a Nobel statement that needs to be modified to include "with the exception of Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans". Yes, they will give us care to a certain extent but not the same as the ones they classify as "Boots on the Ground". I fully believe that these Veterans deserve the benefits that they receive but I also believe that the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans also deserve the benefits.

The Core Statement:

There are also many parts of the Core Statement that needs to be changed. The following statement from then Core statement would be very powerful if it was true. The statement is "The

core values define “who we are,” our culture, and how we care for Veterans and eligible beneficiaries. Our values are more than just words”. Secretary Wilkie, in his letter and Under Secretary Paul Lawrence statement on August 1, 2018 makes it clear that they need to change this statement. To them that statements is just words, since they have not told the whole truth in the letter and Testimony. Action as of truly believing this code needs to be shown.

Some samples are as follows:

The Science Does Support the Presumption That Those Who Served in the Bays, Harbors and Territorial Seas of the Republic of Vietnam Were Exposed to Agent Orange

The VA has decided to just pick certain statements from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports and disregard other statements. The VA stated:

In 2011, the Institute of Medicine (IOM), now the National Academy of Medicine, reviewed all available scientific evidence and concluded that exposure among Blue Water Navy Veterans “cannot reasonably be determined”. However, they failed to state the rest of the paragraph: **“Given the available evidence, the committee recommends that members of the Blue Water Navy should not be excluded from the set or Vietnam-era veterans with presumed herbicide exposure.”**

Now, I must ask, does this fit their **Core Statement of Integrity**. It is one statement that shows that their Core Statements are just words.

Their next **Core Statement** is **Commitment**. It seems they are committed to make sure that Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans are NOT covered. While not the fault of the current leadership of the VA, the problems started a long time ago. In Public Law No: 102-4 it states: **“Directs the Secretary, for facilitating research on the effects of exposure to herbicides used in Vietnam, to establish and maintain a system for the collection and storage of voluntarily contributed blood and tissue samples of veterans who served there. Provides for: (1) specimen security; (2) authorized use; (3) limitations on acceptance of samples; and (4) authority based on specific funding.”** I am, and all other Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans were covered under this law, Yet I know for a fact I was never contacted, and I will bet very few of the members of Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Association or our Facebook page were contacted. Yet the VA claims they have a Commitment to all Veterans.

Their next **Core Statement** is **Advocacy**. They may advocate for Veterans but not for Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans. It appears they work against us. They are working hard to make sure we are not covered. They are willing to wait while more Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans die to do more research, which will be done at the end of next year. Will they work to use those facts to make sure we aren't covered. With the history of Cherry-Picking statement for Reports, I am concerned that this report may not include the majority of Blue Water Navy Veterans alive resulting in a poor outcome for us.

Their next **Core Statement** is **Respect**. I do have to say that when I go to a VA facility here in Las Vegas I feel I get Respect from the people that are serving me. I talk to other Veterans both here and in Other Facilities throughout the county and most do get respect. There are some facilities that are having problems and I hope they will be corrected. Where we are not getting respect is from the Leadership of the VA. They will mis-quote or delete or not include important statements from the letters and testimony to suit them. How is that respect?

Their next **Core Statement** is **Excellence**. This **Core Statement** I will break into two parts. The first part is “**Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement.**” Again, here in Las Vegas I feel the people that serve me in the VA facilities try to live up to this, I know that is not the case in other facilities, I just hope that the one that don’t live up to that statement will be removed from the any facility that is not living up to that statement.

The second part of the Statement is “**Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.**” It seems that the leadership is not being held to this statement. A few facilities are not living up to it along with the Secretary and Under Secretary. The Secretary agreed to a meeting with John Wells from Military Veterans Advocacy yet will not answer his request. I urge you, along with Secretary Wilkie to meet with Commander Wells so he can explain the science and how the distillation system work. I feel that in 2001 the VA made a mistake in excluding benefits for the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans. Perhaps they are now afraid to admit their mistake? It is now time for them to be “**rigorous in correcting them**”

If you take the first letter of each of the letters of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence you get **ICARE**. This is a great state to have but I believe they need to add an asterisk to it and in small letters the state, “With the Exception of Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans”. They are doing everything possible to avoid providing us the benefits we earned and Public Law No: 102-4 granted us, So I ask, where does the ICARE come in for Blue Water Navy Veterans.

One other point I want to address. The VA argues that Agent Orange was **destroyed by sunlight within hours and would not make it out into the South China Sea.**

The IOM covered this point as well. But I would like to cover this in a different way. Why would the United States Government pay Millions of Dollars to clean up Agent Orange in Vietnam over 45 years after it was stopped being used. Something doesn’t seem right here. The VA is saying that Agent Orange would have been destroyed. The USAID is reporting that they are cleaning up Agent Orange 50 years after it was creased to be used. It was just announced that Japan is going to help cleanup the Agent Orange in Vietnam. Who is correct here, the VA or USAID, Japan, Vietnam, and Blue Water Navy Veterans.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read this. If you need any other information, please feel free to contact me at:

Email: commander@bluewaternavy.org

Phone: 408-803-0764

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael E. Yates". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mike Yates
National Commander/Executive Director
Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veteran Association

Cc: Honorable Jon Tester, Ranking Member
Honorable Dean Heller
Honorable Robert Wilkie, Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Mission, Vision, Core Values & Goals

About VA

Mission Statement

To fulfill President Lincoln's promise "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.

Core Values

VA's five core values underscore the obligations inherent in VA's mission: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. The core values define "who we are," our culture, and how we care for Veterans and eligible beneficiaries. Our values are more than just words – they affect outcomes in our daily interactions with Veterans and eligible beneficiaries and with each other. Taking the first letter of each word—Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, Excellence—creates a powerful acronym, "I CARE," that reminds each VA employee of the importance of their role in this Department. These core values

come together as five promises we make as individuals and as an organization to those we serve.

Integrity: Act with high moral principle. Adhere to the highest professional standards. Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.

Commitment: Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA's mission. Fulfill my individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.

Advocacy: Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.

Respect: Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.

Excellence: Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.