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Admitted to practice:
Louisiana
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September 18, 2018

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

Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
825A Hart Senate office Building
Washington DC 20510

Re: HR 299, Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member:

I am writing to you in response to the September 13 correspondence from four former Secretaries of Veterans Affairs. Their letter in opposition to HR 299, like Secretary Wilkie's letter, is misleading.

The former Secretaries claim that ships operated far from land and that any Agent Orange dioxin would have dissipated. Actually most ships operated at one point or another in the bays and harbors of Vietnam, surrounded on three sides by land. Others operated close to the coast to maximize their field of fire. Ships on Yankee Station, which appears to be the frame of reference for the Secretaries, are not covered by this bill.

Additionally, as explained in my September 13 letter, scientific studies have shown the dioxin in seafood 150 nautical miles from shore. The dioxin adhered to water particles and was carried several hundred kilometers in a couple of weeks.

The Secretaries, as they often do, misquote the findings of the National Academies of Science. As explained in my September 13 letter, they pluck one phrase from the conclusion of the report, disregarding the follow on sentence which clearly states: "Moreover, the committee concluded that it could not state with certainty that exposures to Blue Water Navy personnel, taken as a group, were qualitatively different from their Brown Water Navy and ground troop counterparts." Finally they ignore the recommendations of a different National Academy of Science committee that recommended: "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."

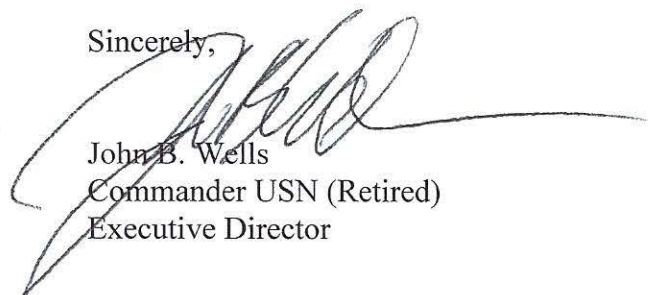
With the exception of former Secretary Shulkin, the VA has consistently opposed this measure. Whether this is due to bureaucratic intrasiegence or incompetence I do not know. The bottom line, however, is that they have misrepresented and "cherry picked" evidence to support their flawed position. That is a stain on the national honor.

Chairman Johnny Isakson
Ranking Member Jon Tester
September 18, 2018

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I will be in Washington next week and I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and any of these former Secretaries to discuss the actual facts and science supporting this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Wells', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John B. Wells
Commander USN (Retired)
Executive Director