

MVA Report from Capitol Hill March 2019. Please “Like” our FB page and follow us on Twitter @MVadvocacy.

Exciting time in Washington DC this past week. Accompanied by Chief of Staff Col Rob Maness, USAF (retired), Deputy Chief of Staff Sgt. Major Jim Kuiken, USMC (retired) (along with his service dog Freedom), Deputy Chief of Staff for Central Pacific Islands former Sgt. Brian Moyer, USMC and Legislative Assistant former Sgt. Brian O’Callaghan, USMC, we had a number of events in support of veterans issues.

On Tuesday March 12, I met briefly with VA Secretary Robert Wilkie at a health public-partnership roll out event.. He reiterated that he is not inclined to seek certiorari from the Supreme Court on *Procopio*, and promised to contact me when the Department of Justice makes their decision. As always, it was a cordial conversation. My gut feeling is that he is preparing to implement *Procopio*.

Wednesday March 13 was the roll out for the Lonnie Kilpatrick Central Pacific Relief Act. Rob, Jim, Brian (O’Callaghan) and I met with Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana to discuss our goal of establishing a toxic exposure research center. Later we met with the Chief of Staff for Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky to discuss VA over prescription which has aggravated Post Traumatic Stress. We also explored our initiatives for revenue management efforts that we believe can capture sufficient funding for veterans benefits

We then welcomed Sheila Kilpatrick and her daughter Kassie to the Hill with lunch at the Capitol Hill Club. Sheila is Lonnie Kilpatrick’s widow and a brave advocate for veterans’ rights. She met Congressmen Doug LaMalfa of California, Steve Palazzo of Mississippi and Jack Bergman of Michigan who all promised their support. Following lunch we met with Congressman Mike San Nicolas of Guam and Congressman Gus Bilirakis of Florida the original sponsors of the Kilpatrick bill. WFLA’s Washington bureau conducted interviews of the Congressmen and Sheila. Congressman San Nicholas then went to the House floor to introduce the legislation, which received the bill number HR 1713. A news report of the event can be found here.

https://www.wfla.com/8-on-your-side/investigations/bill-named-for-tampa-bay-area-veteran-seek-s-to-expand-benefits-for-those-exposed-to-toxic-herbicides/1846582710?fbclid=IwAR0wL6aGP3wyL2mqKQS3fAiDeYZ_j-wzwgyaLpt06jhjdIIKyf_wkT-YGYU.

Thursday March 14 was off to the White House for Rob, Jim ,Freedom and I while Brian Moyer visited offices on the Hill. We had a good introductory meeting with promises of a conference call and follow up meeting later this Spring. The staff was aware of the Blue Water Navy situation and the *Procopio v. Wilkie* court decision. There was no indication that the President was interested in taking the matter to the Supreme Court.

The push back, if it comes, appears to be centered around the State Department. The United States protested the territorial sea claim of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the mid 1970's, after the fall of Saigon, and that protest remains in effect. Aggravating the situation is the current tension in the South China Sea. Whether the State Department will push for the Solicitor

General to petition the Supreme Court and whether the Solicitor General agrees remains to be seen. I would not expect the White House to intervene in that discussion either way. If State convinces the Solicitor General to petition SCOTUS, I remain very confident of our position.

We also met with the Committee staff of the House Veterans Affairs Committee to discuss the re-write of HR 299. That is progressing well. There will still be a cost to the bill due to the “look back” provisions required to reopen adjudicated claims. We also have to allocate several million dollars to cover the Korean DMZ veterans, the spina bifida children of Thailand veterans and the Gulf War study. This requires coordination between the Majority and Minority staffs and the Congressional Budget Office.

Thursday afternoon and all day Friday consisted of Hill visits. In most cases the Members had already co-sponsored HR 299. We updated the staffers on the *Procopio* situation and the progress of the HR 299 re-write. We also educated the staffers on the exposure to ships visiting Guam and to those veterans serving ashore. We also received needed feedback on our toxic exposure research center and on our funding proposals. Brian Moyer was able to corral Congresswoman Jaypal of California to discuss a veterans exemption to the Pay as You Go Act of 2010. She seemed receptive and we will follow up with her staff in the near future.

We currently have 303 co-sponsors for HR 299. “Princess” Susie Belanger, MVA Deputy Chief of Staff for Congressional Liaison has set a goal of 350. HR 1713 is in its infancy with a lot of interest but only 5 co-sponsors. We need folks to follow Mike Kvintus’ plan and make calls to Members of Congress. If the Member has co-sponsored one or both of the bills thank them. If they have not co-sponsored either or both of the bills, ask them to do so. Be civil and polite. We have a great reputation on the Hill and we need to continue it. We also need to present a united front on both bills.

Next week I will be presenting at a Continuing Legal Education program sponsored by the Federal Bar Association as we continue to train attorneys in VA law. The program will be held at the University of Montana.

As always, we appreciate your prayers, kind thoughts and, of course, financial support.

John B. Wells
Commander USN (Retired)
Executive Director