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Here is where we stand. HR 299 is in trouble but the continuing resolution has given us some more time to work things out. We have two Senators who have initiated a hold and that is keeping the bill from passing.

Senator Enzi of Wyoming was advised by the Congressional Budget Office that they underestimated the score by \$1 billion. That exceeds our offset. The CBO letter was based upon information provided by the VA. I have written a reclama however I suspect that I am going to need to meet with CBO. Those meetings are hard to get and it will not happen before the end of this Congress. But the point is, Senator Enzi has a legitimate question. We are hoping to convince him to lift the hold despite the CBO letter. He is a reasonable man.

Senator Lee is a different story. He has either drunk the VA kool aid or is using it as an excuse. We met with his staff on Thursday, It was amicable but I cannot give you any feel for whether he will change his mind. We have asked other Senators to contact him and we have reached out to him using other means. We are monitoring the situation.

By the way, the Big Four VSOs have now dropped their opposition to the offset they had previously agreed to. Had they not delayed the bill we may have been able to have gotten it passed before the VA influenced CBO. The CBO letter came out November 29, 2018, right after the bill was hot lined. The letter from the Legion, VFW, DAV and Paralyzed Veterans came out on September 19. That was a 10 week delay thanks to the VSOs. Those bozos have been nothing but trouble. They give us lip service but cause substantive road blocks. Now they want to go see Senator Lee. God help us. With friends like them who needs enemies?

So what is the bottom line? The delay has made the passage of HR 299 much more unlikely. All we can do is bring pressure on both of these Senators through phone calls and emails. Yes we have some back channel efforts ongoing as well.

The good news is that the oral argument on the Procopio case seemed to go well. You can listen to it here. http://cafc.uscourts.gov/oral-argument-recordings?title=procopio&field_case_number_value=&field_date_value2%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=2018-12-07&=Search. If HR 299 does not pass, we will delay introduction of a new bill until we receive the Procopio decision. Why? If we win Procopio it will drastically affect the CBO score in our favor. Given the expanded score, that may be critical.

Meanwhile, our initial effort for the 116th Congress will be to introduce a bill to cover Guam and Johnston Island. The effect of the GAO report is that herbicide use, if not Agent Orange, was confirmed and both commercial and tactical herbicides contained 2, 4, 5 - T and the 2, 3, 7 8 - TCDD dioxin.

We are also working on our comprehensive toxic exposure bill to cover the other veterans exposed to dioxin, radiation, Gulf War and burn pits. That bill will contain a dedicated funding

source.

I also met with VA Secretary Wilkie on December 3. Apparently my ambush on the escalator is the talk of the VA. The Secretary himself got a kick out of it. It was an amicable meeting but I do not see any relief coming from that avenue at this time. However I left him with a rulemaking request for the territorial seas and Guam/Johnston Island. The VA must address these requests. This gives us another pathway via the Administrative Procedures Act.

There are a few doofuses out there that want to raise hell with Members of Congress the Senate and the White House. Stupid idea! We are complimented across the board for our politeness and civility, Staff personnel like talking to us because we are knowledgeable and courteous. The best way to turn an office against us is to act like a jerk. Many folks do and they get minimal cooperation. We have a lot of folks working on the Hill that are in our corner. Let's keep it that way,

Enough of the calls for a class action. We are too far along in this process. Class actions can take up to a decade or more and the usual winners are the lawyers. They are difficult to put together and often result in a settlement for pennies on the dollar. Bad idea.

We are also getting media support. Steve Andrews from WFLA TV 8 in Tampa, the Veteran's Voice, has always been a great ally. Same with many others. It looks like the "Full Measure" program will also do a story and the Washington Post interviewed Mike Yates, BWNVVA Commander and I, this past week. We have been on the Rob Maness show on CRTV. We have also published several articles in "The Hill."

So will we obtain benefits for the Blue Water Navy this year? Maybe not. But we are closer. We have gotten closer every year. We will continue to push through the courts, the VA and Congress until we get across the finish line. Then we will continue to push until we obtain benefits for Guam, Korea, Thailand Laos, Cambodia, Okinawa, Panama and other places as well as benefits for radiation and burn puts and other forms of toxic exposure. We will not quit. As Lonnie Kilpatrick said on his death bed - "Make It Count!" We will!