



For Immediate Release
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SENATE KILLS BILL TO RESTORE BENEFITS TO VIETNAM- ERA NAVY VETERANS

Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY) last night killed HR 299, the Blue Water Navy Veterans Act, which would have restored Agent Orange benefits for Navy veterans who served in the harbors and coastal waters of Vietnam.

The bill passed the House of Representatives six months ago, and stalled in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. Department of Veterans Affairs officials also reversed course several months ago and withdrew support for the bill, citing the long-term cost of the benefits.

"While veterans are suffering and dying from exposure to Agent Orange, the VA is playing games," said Cdr. John Wells (USN, Ret.), who heads Military Veterans Advocacy and who has been working to pass the bill for years. "By changing cost estimates submitted to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the very agency charged with protecting veterans' interests has caused a huge setback in justice for these veterans."

Despite considerable work to find offsets for the cost of restoring benefits that were taken from Vietnam veterans in 2002, and despite broad, bipartisan support in the Senate, the bill is effectively dead for the year.

"I urge the body to pass the Blue Water Navy bill by

unanimous consent because this is about justice, this is about a bureaucracy making a decision and really not following the intent of this Congress. This is correcting something that was done wrong back in 2002," said Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT)

"There have been four different health studies by the C.D.C. about the detrimental effects of Agent Orange exposure, and the Blue Water Navy veterans have been shown to suffer those exact diseases (and) at the same rate of the other exposed veterans," said Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). "But some of my colleagues are wrongly insisting on a fifth study. We do not have another year to wait. Some of our veterans will not last that long. Many Blue Water veterans have already passed away from the disease associated with Agent Orange exposure. The 1991 bill to provide coverage for veterans exposed to Agent Orange didn't discriminate between those who served offshore and those who served on rivers or on the ground, yet due to a decision by a V.A. bureaucrat in 2002, the coverage for those who served offshore was wiped out. It doesn't make any sense, and we must help all our veterans."

"I am not giving up and Military Veterans Advocacy is not giving up," Wells said. "Not only will we seek passage of the bill again in the next Congress, but we are also taking this fight to court. As Sen. Gillibrand said last night, a bureaucrat's decision 16 years ago thwarted the intent of Congress. If Congress won't correct this egregious injustice, perhaps the federal courts will."

The Court of Appeals for the federal circuit appearing en banc heard arguments on the restoration of benefits last Friday, Dec. 7, in a case brought by Military Veterans Advocacy.

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Military-Veterans Advocacy is a tax exempt non-profit corporation based in Slidell, Louisiana. For more information please go to www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org

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