

July 31, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-230, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
S-221, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
H-329, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

On behalf of the millions of veterans, survivors, and servicemembers that we represent, our organizations write today to ask you to provide additional fiscal support for the implementation of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, signed into law earlier this summer, and by the judicial decision in *Procopio v. Wilkie* in January.

Like you, we seek full and smooth implementation of benefits for Blue Water veterans from the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA), but we recognize this is not possible unless the VA is equipped with the appropriate tools and resources to execute the will of Congress. The VA has indicated in previous letters and testimony that funds appropriated to support disability claims and health care costs for Blue Water veterans and their survivors fall short of the projected actual costs to do so.

In a memo released earlier this month, the VA placed a stay on Blue Water claims until Jan. 1, 2020. Nine veterans service organizations sent a letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie July 24 calling on the administration to lift or modify the blanket stay on these claims. Likewise, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano sent a letter requesting the VA's implementation plan, signaling the committee's commitment to providing the assistance and resources the VA requires. But our efforts to smooth implementation cannot stop there.

According to the Aug. 1, 2018, testimony of VA Under Secretary for Benefits Dr. Paul Lawrence, the VA estimates the cost of extending benefits to Blue Water veterans will be \$5.7 billion. The VA also anticipates an additional \$1 billion is necessary to cover increased health care expenditures, operating expenses, and information technology support for the VBA. In a Sept. 7, 2018, letter from Secretary Wilkie, the VA further estimated it will require 803 new employees to manage these claims, which the VA predicts will be thousands more than the number estimated by the Congressional Budget Office.

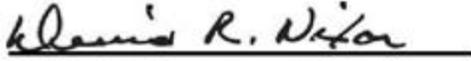
On behalf of our members, we urge Congress to identify the scope of this shortfall, to appropriate suitable resources for the complete and immediate implementation of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, and to assist the VA to ensure this vulnerable group receives in a timely manner the health care and benefits they have been denied for decades.

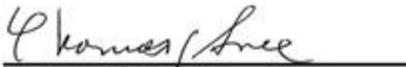
Respectfully,

(Signatures enclosed)


AMSUS, the Society of Federal Health Professionals


AMVETS


Disabled American Veterans


Fleet Reserve Association


Gold Star Wives of America

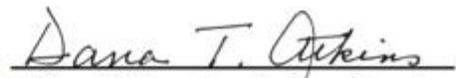

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America


Jewish War Veterans of the USA


The Military Chaplains Assn. of the USA

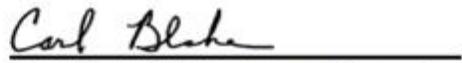

Marine Corps League

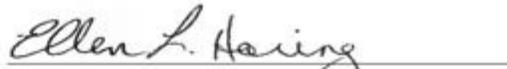

Marine Corps Reserve Association

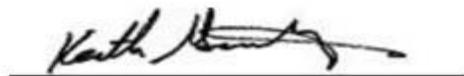

Military Officers Association of America

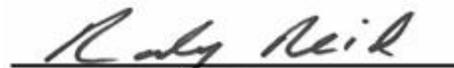

Military Order of the Purple Heart


Naval Enlisted Reserve Assn.


Paralyzed Veterans of America


Service Women's Action Network


The Retired Enlisted Association


USCG Chief Petty Officers Assn.


Wounded Warrior Project

CC:
Senate Appropriations Committee, House Appropriations Committee, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and House Committee on Veterans' Affairs