

Veterans Community Unites Around NDAA Amendment to Cover Additional Agent Orange Presumptives

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By: Cory Titus

A bipartisan amendment to the House version of the FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) would match last week's [<http://content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2020-news-articles/advocacy/senate-ndaa-amendment-would-cover-additional-agent-orange-presumptives/>]Senate NDAA amendment and provide more good news for Vietnam veterans suffering from bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinson's-like symptoms.

House Amendment 264, introduced by Rep. Josh Harder (D-Calif.), would add these conditions, which have been scientifically linked to Agent Orange exposure, to [the list of Agent Orange presumptives](#). The amendment echoes S.A. 1972, which was introduced by Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) last week.

Following the news from the Senate, the veterans' community came together quickly to show its support. Within a week of the announcement, MOAA joined with 32 organizations to send letters to [<http://uploadedfiles/vso-ao-senate.pdf>]Senate and [<http://uploadedfiles/vso-ao-house.pdf>]House leaders asking for their support for the care and compensation of veterans affected by Agent Orange. Gold Star Wives of America and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors shared support independently, adding to the list of organizations behind the measure.

"I'm heartened to see that Congress is not forgetting our Vietnam veterans," MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), said. "As a nation, we must ensure all our veterans are taken care of when they experience negative health consequences like toxic exposures from their service. When illnesses like bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinson's-like symptoms meet the scientific standards to be connected with Agent Orange, we must add them to the list of presumptives.

"Tens of thousands of veterans are suffering from these illnesses," Atkins said. "Congress can care for them by providing the benefits and compensation they deserve. I urge Congress to include Sen. Tester's and Rep. Harder's amendments and pass them in this year's NDAA."

While 35 organizations are backing the measure, showing a high level of support, there are still challenges ahead with passing these amendments. The cost of providing these benefits has held up this issue to date; the VA has the authority to add these diseases to the presumptive list unilaterally, but without the funding, VA officials indicate they will have to make hard choices in cutting benefits to veterans in other areas. It remains uncertain this will be VA's position should Congress approve what could be the agency's [<http://content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2020-news-articles/advocacy/va-gets-boost-in-emergency-funding-for-community-care-in-2021/>]biggest budget ever.

This is where members of Congress need to hear your support on this issue. The House amendment will be considered by the House Rules Committee before making it to the floor, which is expected to happen this week. The Senate amendment will receive a formal vote next week. Many members are still learning about this issue and considering their votes for amendments, so now is the time to [call](#) or [write to](#) your lawmakers.