

MEMORANDUM

TO: All House Members
FROM: Rep. Lee James
DATE: January 14, 2014
SUBJECT: Resolution – (Blue Water Navy Vietnam Vets/ H.R. 543)

I plan to introduce a resolution memorializing Congress to enact H. R. 543 known as the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2013.

During Vietnam, more than 22 million gallons of the chemical were sprayed, which included spraying by hand, aircraft and by the South Vietnamese, during the war to defoliate areas of the jungle and to destroy crops.

The United States Congress passed the Agent Orange Act of 1991 to address the plight of veterans exposed to herbicides while serving in the Republic of Vietnam; the Act amended Title 38 of the United States Code to presumptively recognize as service-connected certain diseases among military personnel who served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1975.

This presumption has provided access to appropriate disability compensation and medical care for Vietnam veterans diagnosed with such illnesses as Type II diabetes, Hodgkin's disease, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, chronic lymphocytic leukemia, multiple myeloma, prostate cancer, respiratory cancers, and soft-tissue sarcomas.

Pursuant to a 2001 directive, the Department of Veterans Affairs policy has denied the presumption of a service connection for herbicide-related illnesses to Vietnam veterans who could not furnish written documentation that they had "boots on the ground" in-country, making it virtually impossible for countless Navy and Air Force veterans to pursue their claims for benefits.

Many who had landed on Vietnamese soil could not produce proof due to incomplete or missing military records; moreover, personnel who had served on ships in the "Blue Water Navy" in Vietnamese territorial waters were, in fact, exposed to dangerous airborne toxins, which not only drifted offshore but also washed into streams and rivers draining into the South China Sea.

To that end, I ask you to join me in sponsoring this resolution asking Congress to recognize the dedication and sacrifice of these brave veterans by enacting H.R. 543 to extend the presumption of service connection to certain diseases by certain Navy and Air Force veterans who served in Vietnam and were recipients of the Vietnam Service Medal or the Vietnam Campaign Medal.