

TCVO Priorities for 115th US Congress:

Exposure to Toxins: Agent Orange and Burn Pits

- Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans: HR 299 introduced 1/5/2017. Author: Rep Valado (R-CA) Cosponsors: Walz (D-MN), Stefanik (R-NY), Courtney (D-CT), Ross (R-FL), LoBiondo (R-NJ). A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes. HR 299 is the reincarnation of HR 969 and S 681 from the 114th US Congress. HR299 has been referred to the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs by the House Veterans Affairs Committee on 1/19/2017. Hearings were held on 4/5/2017. HR299 has 326 Co-sponsors, 19 of whom are from Texas. A plan to extend disability benefits to nearly 100,000 war veterans potentially exposed to Agent Orange on ships off the Vietnam coastline were sidelined 31 OCT over the ongoing dispute about how to pay for it. The failure again raises problematic questions for lawmakers about how to balance federal costs with government responsibilities. Critics noted that on the same day lawmakers offered a massive tax reform measure expected to cost \$5.8 trillion over 10 years, they could not find a way to cover a small fraction of that total to help sick veterans. **HR 299 is considered DEAD for the 115th US Congress.**
- Senate Companion Bill S422 was introduced by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and referred to the Committee on Veterans Affairs on 2/16/2017. S422 has 42 Cosponsors, none from Texas. Text: A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes. S422 has 48 Cosponsors; none from Texas. Reference Companion Bill HR299, which is considered DEAD due to an inability for lawmakers to find a method to pay for the cost of caring for Blue Water Veterans affected by exposure to Agent Orange. **S422 is also considered DEAD for the 115th US Congress.**
- Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act: S319. A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans to establish within the Department of Veterans Affairs a center of excellence in the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, and rehabilitation of health conditions relating to exposure to burn pits. Senate Bill S319 authored by Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) was introduced 6 Feb 2017 and referred to the Committee on Veterans Affairs. S319 has 14 Cosponsors, none from Texas. There has been **no further action** taken on S319 by the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs.
- Agent Orange Reconciliation Act HR2891: 6/13/17 Congressman Sanford D Bishop (GA-02) and Congressman Charlie Dent (R-PA) reintroduced the Agent Orange Reconciliation Act of 2017 (HR2891) in an effort to help heal the post-conflict, human cost of war by caring for children living with Spina Bifida due to a Vietnam Veteran parent's exposure to Agent Orange. Spina Bifida requires costly surgeries and extensive medical care because of potential paralysis resulting from damage to the spinal cord. The AO Reconciliation Act of 2017 would fill gaps in the AO Benefits Act (Public Law 104-204) by providing one-time retroactive monetary payment to the families with children enduring Spina Bifida to compensate for treatment of related symptoms from birth until the date benefits under the original Act were first received. 6/13/17: introduced in House; referred to House Committee on Veterans Affairs, and subsequently to the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. **No further action.**

Accomplishments during the 115th US Congress:

- S305: Vietnam Veterans Recognition Act of 2017. Signed into public law 115-15 by President Trump on 29 March 2017. The Act encourages display of the flag of the United States on National Vietnam War Veterans Day, designated as March 29th.
- HR3218: Forever GI Bill (Harry W Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017): along with Senate Companion Bill S1598, is an enhanced version of the original GI Bill and was signed into law by President Trump on 8/16/2017 to become Public Law 115-48.