

United States Senate

November 8, 2019

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
Director of Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20571

Dear Director Mulvaney and Secretary Wilkie,

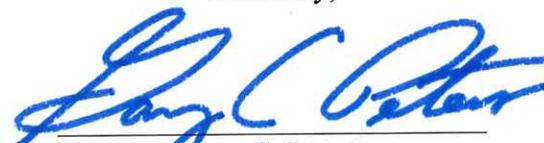
I am writing to express concern with the Trump Administration's apparent refusal to take appropriate measures to immediately support veterans who are suffering from illnesses associated with Agent Orange exposure. Despite having the authority to act, the Administration has demonstrated a pattern of delay and evasiveness while these veterans wait for help. Your inaction places you squarely between tens of thousands of veterans and life-saving treatment and benefits.

Veterans should not have to file lawsuits or Freedom of Information Act requests to find out if the Administration is going to provide this support. Yet that is how we learned the Office of Management and Budget claims it "lacks confidence" in scientific evidence that links Agent Orange exposure to hypothyroidism, bladder cancer, hypertension, and Parkinsonism. If you have information that would counter the National Academies of Medicines' findings on the correlation between Agent Orange and these conditions, I request that you provide it to me immediately. If such information does not exist, I request that the Administration either immediately add these conditions to the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) list of Agent Orange presumptive diseases or provide my office with an explanation regarding why the Administration is declining to provide this relief to veterans.

Of equal concern, the Administration appears to be unnecessarily delaying benefits to veterans who have already been determined eligible for assistance. The President signed the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act into law on June 25, 2019. The new law allows VA to offer benefits to veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam and were exposed to Agent Orange. This followed a January 29, 2019 federal court decision that ruled VA cannot deny disability benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans. Despite authorization from Congress and the courts, VA is not processing Blue Water Navy veteran claims. After decades of waiting for help, VA has needlessly told veterans to wait longer.

Stonewalling veterans like this is completely unfair. Vietnam veterans are aging. Those who pass away waiting will not be able to provide their spouses with survivors' benefits. This matter demands urgency. I look forward to your immediate response.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator