

Boozman, Donnelly Fight for Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange During Service in Thailand

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators John Boozman (R-AR) and Joe Donnelly (D-IN) introduced legislation to allow veterans who served in Thailand during the Vietnam War-era the opportunity to prove toxic exposure in order to qualify for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits.

“We made a commitment to our veterans, but current VA policy restricting service-connected benefits for our men and women who served in certain locations and career fields in Thailand during their military service is undermining that commitment. Arbitrarily limiting consideration of a veteran’s claim is misguided, especially considering the VA determined that herbicides were used on fenced-in perimeters of military bases in Thailand. This will eliminate the unreasonable burden on veterans to prove toxic exposure,” **Boozman said.**

Donnelly said, “These brave Americans served our country and have earned our respect and gratitude. I’m proud to work with Senator Boozman on this bipartisan legislation that would ensure that all veterans potentially exposed to Agent Orange while serving in Thailand are given opportunity to receive the benefits they are due for their service.”

VA currently awards service-connected benefits for exposure to toxic chemicals to veterans whose duties placed them on or near the perimeters of Thai military bases from February 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975. This restriction arbitrarily disqualifies veterans who may otherwise be able to prove their exposure.

For more than 20,000 conditions determined by the VA to be eligible for service-connected exposure to toxic chemicals in Fiscal Year 2016, 12,025 claims were filed by veterans who served in Thailand during the Vietnam War-era. Only 14 percent of those claims were approved for additional benefits.

"The VFW greatly appreciates the support from Senators Boozman and Donnelly on this important issue. The idea that veterans can only be exposed to Agent Orange if they were on a small portion of a base ignores both science and common sense. The fact is that veterans were exposed on all parts of these bases and now suffer from the effects of Agent Orange. We look forward to the passage of this important legislation that will provide long overdue recognition and care that these veterans deserve," **said Carlos Fuentes, Director, VFW National Legislative Service.**