



March 28, 2012

The Honorable Chris Gibson (NY-20)  
U.S. House of Representatives  
502 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Gibson,

On behalf of the Association of the United States Navy (AUSN), we applaud and support your bill H.R. 3612, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act. During Vietnam, the U.S. Army sprayed more than 19 million gallons of the Agent Orange herbicide that has had devastating effects upon those who served in or around Vietnam, including numerous forms of cancer, diabetes and Parkinson's disease. The Agent Orange Act of 1991 empowered the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to declare certain illnesses "presumptive" to exposure to Agent Orange and enable Vietnam veterans to receive disability compensation for these related conditions.

However, in 2002, the VA limited the scope of the Act to only those veterans who could provide orders for "boots on the ground" in Vietnam (encompassing infantry and riverine Navy). As a result, veterans who served in the waters off the coast of Vietnam, commonly called "blue water veterans" were forced to file individual claims with the VA to restore their benefits. The VA has denied 32,880 such claims through 2009 alone! H.R. 3612 would extend presumptive coverage to blue water veterans who served up to 12 miles off shore Vietnam during 1962-1975. Presumptive coverage lifts the burden from the individual veteran to prove direct exposure to Agent Orange, a nearly impossible task due to a lack of record keeping and the inability to know the precise location of dioxins in the air and groundwater, and extends the same presumption that currently exists for veterans who served on land and inland waterways to those "blue water veterans."

Thank you for taking an active role on such an important issue to both our Navy and our veteran communities. Correcting this oversight at the Department of Veterans Affairs sends an important message to our Sailors who served in Vietnam. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at 703-548-5800.

Sincerely,

Anthony A. Wallis  
Legislative Director, AUSN