

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**GILLIBRAND URGES PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION TO HELP THOUSANDS OF  
“BLUE WATER” VIETNAM VETS EXPOSED TO AGENT ORANGE IN VETERAN  
AFFAIRS HEARING**

*Senate Committee Holds Hearing On “Blue Water” Vietnam Vets Exposure to Agent Orange*

**\*\*WATCH Senator Gillibrand’s Testimony [Here](#)\*\***

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand today testified before the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee on behalf of thousands of “Blue Water” veterans from the Vietnam War who were exposed to the dangerous toxin Agent Orange but are currently ineligible to receive health and disability benefits. The *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015* would make it easier for the VA to process Vietnam War veterans’ claims for service-connected conditions. Gillibrand introduced the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015* with Senators Steve Daines (R-MT) on March 15, 2015.

The testimony as prepared for delivery is below and video available [here](#).

“Thank you, Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Blumenthal, for inviting me to testify at this important hearing.

“I also want to thank Senators Blumenthal and Moran for introducing the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015.

“Their bill would bolster the research we do on the health conditions faced by descendants of veterans who were exposed to toxins during their military service and I am proud to support this legislation.

“I also want to thank Senator Daines for joining me today. He has been a tremendous partner in this push to give our Blue Water Veterans the coverage they earned and deserve.

“Mr. Chairman, during the Vietnam War, thousands of American servicemembers were exposed to Agent Orange.

“Servicemembers like Keith Martel, from upstate New York.

“Keith was a sailor in the Vietnam War for three years, from 1967 to 1970.

“A few years after he got out, he joined the New York Army National Guard, and stayed with them for decades.

“On September 11th, 2001, he answered the call and went to Ground Zero. Then, two years later, in his 50s, Keith was sent to Iraq.

“Keith was exposed to Agent Orange when he was in Vietnam. And now he has prostate cancer, which has been linked to the Agent Orange.

“So what do you think the Department of Veterans Affairs did when Keith first went to them for coverage?

“They said, “Sorry, your boat was here – not here – so we can’t help you. Sorry, you didn’t have boots on the ground.”

“All those Blue Water Navy veterans like Keith – we’re letting them down. The US government has recognized the dangers of Agent Orange since the 1960s.

“Congress passed the Agent Orange Act in 1991, which allowed all Vietnam veterans to receive presumptive coverage if they had a Vietnam Service Medal, and could prove they had symptoms related to Agent Orange exposure.

“But then in 2002, the VA decided to change the intent of Congress, and halt its coverage to an estimated 174,000 veterans – including those who had served in the “blue water” just off of Vietnam’s coast.

“Since then, instead of treating EVERY Vietnam veteran who suffers from a disease caused by Agent Orange the VA is only treating those veterans who stepped foot on Vietnamese soil, or whose boats were patrolling Vietnam’s rivers.

“This distinction, which excludes the veterans who served on boats in Vietnam’s bays and harbors, was recently ruled by the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, as arbitrary and capricious.

“We’re seeing veterans who DID serve, who WERE exposed to Agent Orange, and who ARE now sick being denied coverage because of this arbitrary, bureaucratic decision by the VA.

“The science doesn’t support their policy either.

“The Australian Department of Veterans Affairs recently commissioned a study by the University of Queensland’s National Research Centre for Environmental Toxicology, to research Agent Orange exposure from the Navy’s water distillation process.

“In the study, ships in near-shore marine waters collected water that was contaminated with the runoff from areas sprayed with Agent Orange and they found that the distillation methods used on their ships – the same methods used on American Navy ships – actually concentrated the Agent Orange in the drinking water.

“Mr. Chairman, the evidence is clear that we need to pass the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015.

“We need to ensure that the thousands of brave veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War receive VA care for illnesses related to their Agent Orange exposure.

“Because each day that we delay passage of this bill, Vietnam veterans continue to become ill and go into bankruptcy from trying to pay their medical bills, because they are unable to receive coverage from the VA.

“Mr. Chairman: Because of the urgency of this issue, I request that your committee mark up this legislation, and expeditiously report it favorably to the floor for consideration by the full Senate.

“Thank you.”

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