

Statement of Congressman Mike Thompson
House Veterans Affairs Committee
October 10, 2002

Thank you Chairman Cleland and Ranking Member Hutchison for holding this hearing. It comes on the brink of an historic decision that Congress will be making regarding authorizing our Armed Forces to take action against Iraq. This hearing is even more imperative because we are once again asking our troops to answer the call of duty and to confront a dangerous enemy. Our servicemembers must know that we stand by them during times of war and peace.

My own personal experience with this issue began over three years ago when a constituent of mine, Jack Alderson, asked me to investigate something he called Project SHAD. I am honored that Jack is here today and that he will be sharing his knowledge with you. He is a great patriot who has refused to disclose classified information regarding these tests until the DoD has acted. He has not broken the promise he made to his country nearly 40 years ago despite hearing of crew illness and experiencing illness himself.

Jack was the commander of five tugs used in these experiments. At first the Department of Defense told us that Project SHAD did not exist. Then we were told that it did exist but only simulants were used in the tests. Finally, after three years of pressure, DoD not yet five months ago revealed that these tests involved harmful chemical and biological agents the worst of which included VX nerve gas and Sarin nerve gas.

The DoD has called Vx one of the most lethal substances ever synthesized and as we all know Sarin was used in the deadly terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway system. Yet we put at least 5,500 of our servicemembers at risk by exposing them to these hazardous agents. It is incumbent upon this Congress to ensure that any servicemember who participated in these tests is provided with appropriate evaluation and treatment if they have long lasting health problems associated with these tests.

I've introduced legislation along with my friends Representative Michael Bilirakis of Florida and Senator Bill Nelson of Florida that would seek to provide relief and care for veterans who were involved in these and similar tests by requiring the DoD to release all relevant information.

After all, veterans have the right to know:

- 1) What agents they were exposed to;
- 2) What the lasting health effects are; and
- 3) Where they can receive medical care.

They have the right to know and they should have known a long time ago.

As you know, The Department of Defense released new declassified information yesterday which for the first time describes testing done on American soil and overseas. Alaska, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Utah, Canada, and England were the locations used and DoD claims that civilians were only exposed to simulants. Keep in mind that some of these simulants are still live biological agents and may be harmful. It appears that not only were soldiers put at risk but the civilian population the DoD is charged with protecting may also have been put at risk.

SHAD and similar cases of chemical and biological testing on servicemembers is an issue of TRUST and INTEGRITY. Our

military personnel put their trust in our government to protect them and our integrity has been compromised because nearly 40

years later we are still not protecting them. How can we expect the current generation of soldiers to put their lives on the line

knowing that harm from the enemy may not be the only danger they encounter?

Jack and other crewmembers are beginning or

have already experienced health problems that may be associated with these tests. It is deplorable and inexcusable that the

Department of Defense has taken nearly 40 years to begin to release this information. That's why this hearing is important and I

want to thank each of you on the committee for your commitment to seeking the truth. I am grateful to you and I know that the

thousands of veterans who participated in these tests are also grateful.