

March 17, 2009

**Help Vietnam Veterans Suffering from Parkinson's Disease!
Co-Sponsor H.R. 1428**

Dear Colleague:

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a common neurodegenerative disease affecting up to a million people in the United States. Estimates of incidence of Parkinson's range from 18 to 182 per 100,000, making it the second-most neurodegenerative disease after Alzheimer's. According to the IOM (2006), the peak incidence of Parkinson's in the general population is consistently found in people in their seventies and eighties. In Vietnam veterans, onset occurs primarily before the age of fifty.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM), pursuant to the Agent Orange Act of 1991, provides biennial reports on Agent Orange and other herbicides-related health issues affecting our nation's veterans. In 1994, the IOM identified early onset of Parkinson's as a key element in connecting PD in veterans to exposure to herbicides, yet no follow-up studies in this area have been conducted. In 2008, during a hearing before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, the Institute of Medicine acknowledged that several studies have reported associations of Parkinson's disease with exposure to "pesticides" or to "herbicides" in general. It reported to the Committee that it intends to continue investigating a stronger association link, though it concluded that the current evidence it has reviewed remains insufficient. In the same report (2006 Biennial Report), it drew the identical conclusion for Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), which VA later added in 2008 as a presumptively compensable illness for all veterans with 90 days or more of continuously active service in the military, albeit not just for herbicides exposure.

Strong evidence has existed for decades to make the association link between exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides and Parkinson's Disease. In a Stanford University study, (not yet published—reported to the Committee in an Abstract) *Military Deployment and the Risk of Parkinson's Disease* (2005) found that Vietnam veterans are 2.6 times more at risk of PD than veterans not deployed to this war. Additionally, an Iowa Agriculture Health Study Update (2007) found that individuals who were exposed to paraquat, cyanazine, trifluralin or 2,4,5,T, which is a component of Agent Orange, had an increased risk of Parkinson's disease. The IOM in its 1994 Report also noted a 1983 study that reported laboratory workers exposed to an herbicide similar to paraquat, (MPTP) had insidious onset of parkinsonism concluding that chronic exposure could be associated with the problem. In 1979, the General Accounting Office concluded that unlike civilian applications of Agent Orange that were diluted in water or oil, military applications were sprayed in undiluted concentrations up to 25% higher.

While I am encouraged that the IOM intends to continue investigating the overwhelming evidence of an association between exposure to Agent Orange and Parkinson's Disease, time is

running out for these veterans and we must act now. Currently there are over 10 presumptive conditions associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents for veterans who served in Vietnam including, Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, soft-tissue sarcoma, chloracne or another acne form disease, Hodgkin's disease, Porphyria cutanea tarda, respiratory cancers, multiple myeloma, Type 2 diabetes and amyloidosis (AL)(also just added by VA in 2008). However, this list is not exhaustive, as research of Agent-Orange/herbicides associated diseases continues and unfortunately new disease associations are emerging. My bill would add a presumption of service-connection for Parkinson's Disease for veterans who served in Vietnam, were exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides and have a degree of disability of 10 percent or more.

Time is of the essence for many of our Vietnam veterans suffering from PD. Many have already lost the battle with Parkinson's and those who remain, along with their families, are fighting for their lives everyday from their Agent Orange and other herbicides related diseases-- uncompensated for their sacrifice. There is still a chance for our nation to meet its obligations to these noble veterans. To be added to my bill, H.R. 1428, please call or e-mail Megan Williams at x53608 or at megan.williams@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

BOB FILNER
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
<http://veterans.house.gov>