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REFORM

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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April 17, 2014

Representative Helen J. Head
Chairwoman
House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs
Room 41
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Representative Head,

Thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing regarding the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2013. I appreciate that you are taking time from your busy schedule to focus on the important issue of ensuring that all Vietnam Veterans are able to access all benefits they have earned.

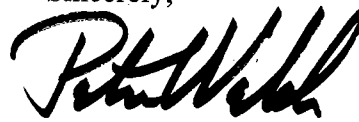
I want to acknowledge this resolution's chief sponsor, Representative Vicki Strong. More than most, you understand what it means to sacrifice for one's country. I appreciate your fierce advocacy for those who are serving and have served. Through this advocacy you honor your son Jesse's legacy.

Our nation has an obligation to ensure that those who put on a uniform and serve our country are treated fairly and with respect when they return home. Few would argue that a veteran who suffered injury resulting from their service should be compensated for their hardship. The VA Claims process for determining eligibility for service-connected disability compensation can be extremely challenging, especially when sickness has resulted from exposure to a toxin. This is why in 1991 Congress pushed the VA to establish a presumptive list of conditions for anyone who served in Vietnam and therefore was exposed to Agent Orange. Unfortunately, for those who served in the waters off of Vietnam who are not eligible for the presumptive determination the burden of documentation too often proves insurmountable.

I have joined with Congressman Chris Gibson in sponsoring the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2013 because those who served during Vietnam, either in country or in the waters offshore, should be given the benefit of the doubt when applying for benefits. An offered benefit that is impossible to prove is no benefit at all. Instead, an unfairly denied benefit often becomes an unending source of frustration. I will continue to work to honor not just Vietnam Veterans but all veterans by ensuring that the claims process is fair and efficient and does not put undue burdens on those who have served.

Thank you again for shining a light on this important matter and for your work on behalf of Vermont's veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Welch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P".

PETER WELCH
Member of Congress