

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 3, 2009

Christopher R. Owner, PhD
Director, Directorate of Clinical Sciences
Armed Forces Institute of Pathology
6825 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20306-6000

Dear Dr. Owner:

It has come to our attention that a growing number of troops who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are becoming sick and dying from what appears to be overexposure to dangerous toxins produced by burn pits used to destroy waste.

It has further been reported that scores of returning veterans who were exposed to burn pits display similar symptoms: chronic bronchitis, asthma, sleep apnea, chronic coughs and allergy-like symptoms. Several also have cited heart problems, lymphoma and leukemia.

After years of helping veterans of the Vietnam and Gulf wars cope with the health effects of toxic battlefields, we have learned that we must take exposures to toxins seriously to ensure that this generation of service members does not face the same difficulties.

Therefore, we are requesting two groups of data from the Department of Defense tumor registry. Group One would include the course of time from 1998 through the end of 2002; and Group Two would include the time from 2003 to the present. The information we request in both Groups One and Two is the total number of active duty cancer cases with the following fields: Year diagnosed, cancer or site code, and age of service member. In addition, for Group Two, we request an identifier noting whether the service member is an OIF/OEF veteran.

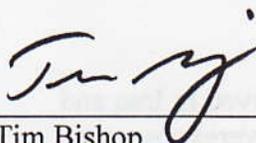
We are collecting this data in order to help better understand what is happening to our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and to determine whether to request that the Veterans Administration (VA) create disabilities that are presumptively related to certain types of service, such as Operation Iraqi Freedom. This would help to ensure specific benefits for service members who have been discharged from service if they become disabled because of certain diseases. The VA can create "presumptive" benefits for veterans with certain diseases following specific service if the all the data collected shows a statistically valid sample of those service members or veterans becoming sick as compared to, for example, veterans who never left the continental United States.

We understand that this information would not be all inclusive, nor would this be the only research needed in order create such regulations. However, this would be a useful step.

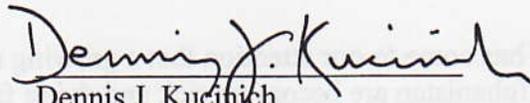
This may also provide us information that shows no statistically valid information, which would be equally important.

Our efforts could benefit many sick and disabled veterans and their families if evidence shows such a need. The information we have requested from you is essential in helping us to advocate for the right future decisions on this issue.

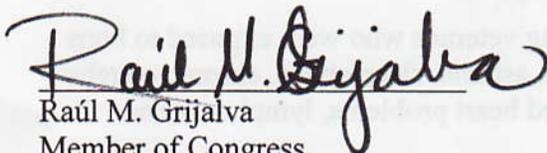
Your timely cooperation in this matter is appreciated. Please contact Will Jenkins in Congressman Tim Bishop's office at 202-225-3826 if you have any questions.



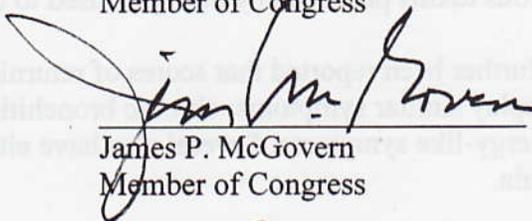
Tim Bishop
Member of Congress



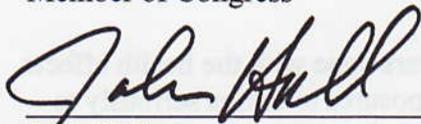
Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



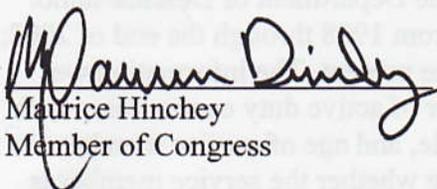
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



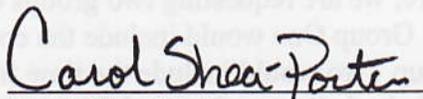
John Hall
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