

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 2, 2009

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

It has come to our attention that a growing number of veterans 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.

Further conversations with other veterans have revealed that the Armed Forces have not investigated this threat adequately, nor have they studied the impact of a combination of toxin particles on individuals.

The *Military Times* reports 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.

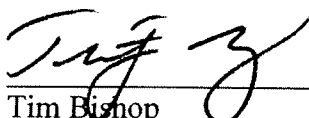
Therefore, we request that the Department of Veterans Affairs investigate the combined effect of sand, burn pits, dioxins, benzene, and volatile organic compounds on returning veterans pursuant to your authority under the Gulf War Advisory Committee.


We are also requesting that you compile statistics of toxin levels of those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan compared to those not serving Iraq and Afghanistan to establish potential correlations.


Finally, we are requesting that the Department of Veterans Affairs notify doctors that veterans have been exposed to chemicals from fires in Iraq and Afghanistan.


Thank you for your attention and assistance in this matter. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the quality of VA health care, benefits and related programs measures up to the valor and sacrifices made by this nation's veterans.

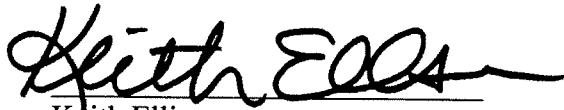
Sincerely,

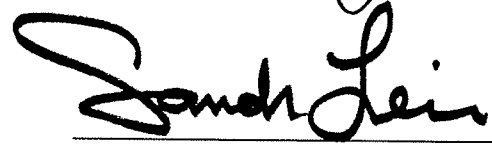
  
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Tim Bishop  
Member of Congress

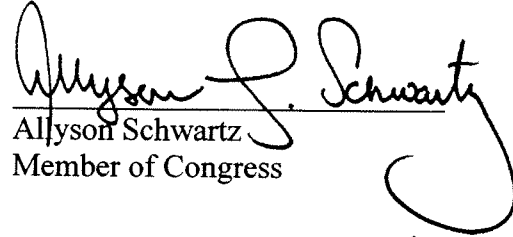
  
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Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

  
Bill Delahunt  
Member of Congress

  
Maurice Hinchey  
Member of Congress

  
Keith Ellison  
Member of Congress

  
Sander M. Levin  
Member of Congress

  
Allyson Schwartz  
Member of Congress