

## ISSUE BRIEF: Agent Orange Presumptive Diseases

### The Situation

- The National Academy of Medicine's 2014 update, "Veterans and Agent Orange," published in 2016, concluded that there was compelling evidence for adding bladder cancer and hypothyroid conditions as presumptive diseases. Further, the study clarified that Vietnam veterans with "Parkinson-like symptoms," but without a formal diagnosis of Parkinson's disease, should be considered under the presumption that Parkinson's disease is service connected.
- The report noted that although the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has not found hypertension to be presumptively related to service in Vietnam, the committee reaffirmed the conclusions of previous studies that hypertension should be placed in the category of limited or suggestive evidence of association.
- On November 1, 2017, the VA issued a press release noting they were exploring these new presumptive conditions related to herbicide exposure.
- The December 2018 National Academy of Medicine report notes there is sufficient evidence of a relationship between hypertension and Agent Orange and recommended it to be added to the presumptive list.
- In a March 2019 congressional hearing, the VA indicated that a decision on these presumptives could be released within 90 days. Subsequently, in a 2019 Senate hearing in September, it was noted that VA leadership, in accord with Policy 0215, had been considering the addition of these diseases since early summer 2019.

### The Challenge

- VA internal documents reveal that the Administration challenged the previous Secretary's authority to add the presumptive diseases and even impeded action.
- Bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and "Parkinson-like symptoms" have been held up for more than three years while veterans are suffering and dying from these diseases. Even more troubling is the Administration is outweighing the cost of adding these diseases over those who are in dire need.
- VA indicates it is waiting for results of the *Vietnam Era Health Retrospective Observational Study (VE-HEROES)*, estimated to be completed in December 2019. The study is assessing the current health and well-being of Vietnam veterans, Blue Water Navy veterans, and veterans who served elsewhere during the Vietnam era (1961-1975). Researchers are looking closely at neurologic conditions and hepatitis C infection as a part of this study. However, this study is not specific to association of hypertension, bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and "Parkinson-like symptoms."

### The Solution

- Congress must enact legislation to add the presumptive diseases that the National Academy of Medicine has scientifically associated to Agent Orange exposure. Enacting H.R. 2200, Keeping Our Promises Act, will add hypertension, bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and "Parkinson-like symptoms" to the presumptive disease list for Agent Orange exposure.