



September 28, 2017

The Honorable David Valadao
United States House of Representatives
1728 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Valadao,

On behalf of The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research (MJFF), I write to express my support and appreciation for your legislation, H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017*. It is estimated that 80,000 veterans in the United States have Parkinson's disease (PD). As the world's largest nonprofit funder of PD research, MJFF is dedicated to accelerating a cure for Parkinson's and developing improved therapies. In providing more than \$750 million in research to date, the Foundation has fundamentally altered the trajectory of progress toward a cure.

It is estimated that between 750,000 and 1 million people in the United States have PD, with an annual economic burden of between \$19.8 and \$26.4 billion. In 2010, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) finalized its regulation recognizing PD as being associated with exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during military service. This regulatory change occurred subsequent to, and as a result of, the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's conclusion in its report "Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2008", that there is "suggestive but limited evidence that exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides used during the Vietnam War is associated with an increased change of developing Parkinson's Disease".

The *Agent Orange Act of 1991* authorized the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide disability compensation to veterans suffering from illnesses which are "presumptive" to exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War era. However, in 2002, the VA narrowed the scope of Vietnam veterans qualified to receive compensation to those who could provide proof of "boots on the ground" in Vietnam or who served in inland waterways. As a result, veterans who served in the waters off the coast of Vietnam, known as "Blue Water Navy" veterans, no longer meet the presumption and instead must file disability compensation claims individually. H.R. 299 would restore the presumption of exposure to Agent Orange to "Blue Water Navy" veterans.

The MJFF applauds you for your authorship of this important piece of legislation and thanks you for your continued commitment to the brave men and women who have served the United States. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Stephanie Katz at skatz@michaeljfox.org or by phone at 202-638-4101 ext. 352.

Sincerely,

Ted Thompson, JD
Senior Vice President of Public Policy