

For Immediate Release

Guam Agent Orange Veteran exposure passes the House

H.R. 3967, The Honoring Our Pact Act, passed the U.S. House of Representatives with a bi-partisan vote of 256 yeas and 174 nays. 34 Republicans voted for the Bill joining 222 Democratic votes.

Within the Bill, led by Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano, is language incorporated from Congressman Michael San Nicolas' Bill H.R. 3368 the "Lonnie Kilpatrick Central Pacific Relief Act" named after the veteran who led the fight to recognize dioxin use on Guam known as Agent Orange, and who passed from the exposures.

Specifically the passed language provides a presumption of service-connection for diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents to veterans who served on (1) Guam or American Samoa, or in the territorial waters thereof, between January 9, 1962, and July 31, 1980; or (2) Johnston Atoll or a ship that went to Johnston Atoll between January 1, 1972, and September 30, 1977. Under a presumption of service-connection, specific diseases diagnosed in certain veterans are presumed to have been caused by the circumstances of their military service. Health care benefits and disability compensation may then be awarded.

Additionally, the bill expands eligibility for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care to veterans with a disability associated with exposure to certain herbicides during specified times of military service on Guam, American Samoa, or Johnston Atoll.

"This huge first step in the Congress acknowledging compensable Dioxin use on Guam, and in expanding Agent Orange coverage for those exposed during specific times, is a watershed moment in the history of Guam veteran advocacy," said Congressman San Nicolas.

"So many gave their lives to this cause, so many of their families picked up and carried on after their loss, and today we can say that the U.S. House of Representatives does so acknowledge what they have been fighting for - Dioxin was used on Guam, it made people sick, and it killed them, and it is only just that they be recognized and supported as all other Agent Orange exposed veterans and their families are," Congressman San Nicolas continued.

"We would like to thank the late Lonnie Kilpatrick and his family for inspiring so many of us to 'make it count,' all those veterans who have served and suffered under these conditions for their service, the leadership of Chairman Takano and the Veterans Affairs Committee for their support of our language inclusion, and the people of Guam for the humbling opportunity to fight for causes like these," Congressman San Nicolas concludes.

Next the legislation makes it's way to the Senate for deliberation and consideration.