



Office of the Speaker

BENJAMIN J.F. CRUZ

I Mina'trentai Kuåtrot na Liheslaturan Guåhan

Committee on Appropriations and Adjudication

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SPEAKER BENJAMIN J.F. CRUZ ON AGENT ORANGE

(Hagåtña, Guam) In response to recent media inquiries, Speaker Benjamin J.F. Cruz issued the following statement:

"While I am glad that federal entities are finally paying attention, a GAO report won't do anything to help the men and women who've been ignored and abandoned by their government for decades. 'Better late than never' only matters if you are alive long enough to see it.

For many years; I've heard far too many heartbreaking accounts from servicemen who, in duty to their country, were exposed to Agent Orange and unjustly denied benefits for diseases associated with the herbicide.

Although the U.S. Department of Defense has not officially confirmed the use or storage of Agent Orange at Vietnam staging areas such as Guam, there have been numerous reports, such as the 2002 public health assessment published by the U.S. Department of Health's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, revealing that TCDD dioxins--chemical contaminants in the Agent Orange herbicide--were indeed present in the soil at Andersen Air Force Base.

To remedy this issue, I introduced a legislative resolution (Resolution No. 172 (EC)) in 2008, urging Congress to include Guam in the Agent Orange Equity Act so that Vietnam veterans who were exposed to the herbicide while stationed here can apply for benefits. Within the resolution, I noted that there has been some--albeit inconsistent--federal acknowledgment of Agent Orange use on the island.

A 2005 ruling from the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans, for example, found that a Vietnam veteran, serving on Andersen Air Force Base from 1966-1968, had developed diabetes mellitus due to Agent Orange exposure. Similarly, in 2007, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs acknowledged another Guam case by granting Agent Orange exposure benefits to Robert Burgett, who had been diagnosed with laryngeal cancer and a subsequent speech disability.

Despite this resolution's passage in the Guam Legislature and our continued efforts, the Act still excludes Guam veterans."

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For more information, please contact the Office of Speaker Benjamin J.F. Cruz at #477-2520.

Address: Guam Congress Building 163 Chalan Santo Papa, Hagåtña, Guam 96910

Phone: 671-477-2520 / Email: Senator@SenatorBjCruz.com / Website: SenatorBjCruz.com