

FLASH UPDATE

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Sucker-punched, blind-sided and betrayed

Vietnam War Navy veterans claim the new head of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Robert Wilkie, stabbed them in the back by promising to meet with them and instead, fired off a letter trying to kill a bill that grants them Agent Orange benefits.



Wilkie sent a letter to Sen. Johnny Isakson (R)-Georgia claiming, "science does not support extending Agent Orange benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans." "When I met with Secretary Wilkie at his confirmation hearing, he promised me a meeting on this subject," said John Wells, Executive Director of Military Veterans Advocacy, Inc. Instead of a face-to-face, John Wells accuses Robert Wilkie of betrayal.

Wilkie sent the letter to Isakson, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, which is now considering the legislation. The letter claims the bill will cost more than anticipated and create a bigger claims backlog. According to John Wells, Wilkie is distorting the facts.

"He's come out with inaccurate and inflammatory material designed to convince Senate Chairman Johnny Isakson to not move this bill forward," Wells said.

For years, the VA opposed extending benefits to veterans who served on ships in the harbors, bays and territorial waters of Vietnam. In June, the house unanimously passed the bill granting them benefits long denied. Blue Water Navy veterans contend Agent Orange seeped from rivers and streams into harbors, bays and territorial waters.

Ships unknowingly pulled in contaminated water, desalinating it for drinking, bathing and cooking.

Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC)

Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) is a program that was created for disability and non-disability military retirees with combat-related disabilities. It is a tax free entitlement that you will be paid each month along with any retired pay you may already be receiving.

Eligibility

To qualify for CRSC you must:

- be entitled to and/or receiving military retired pay**
- be rated at least 10 percent by the Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA)**
- waive your VA pay from your retired pay**
- file a CRSC application with your Branch of Service**

Disabilities that may be considered combat related include injuries incurred as a direct result of:

- Armed Conflict**
- Hazardous Duty**
- An Instrumentality of War**
- Simulated War**

Retroactive Payment:

In addition to monthly CRSC payments, you may be eligible for a retroactive payment. DFAS will audit your account to determine whether or not you are due retroactive payment. An audit of your account requires researching pay information from both DFAS and VA.

If you are due any money from DFAS, you will receive it within 30-60 days of receipt of your first CRSC monthly payment. If DFAS finds that you are also due a retroactive payment from the VA, we will forward an audit to the VA. They are responsible for paying any money they may owe you.

Burn Pit act passes in House of Representatives

The House of Representatives has passed a bill that would ban burn pits on military bases. It's a bill that local Congressman, Dr. Raul Ruiz, also a co-sponsor, has been advocating for a year and a half. The 'Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act' would create burn pit resource centers for veterans. It renames the "airborne hazards centers of excellence" and adds \$5 million in additional funding for burn pit study and research. Burn pits have been used on military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan to burn all waste on the base. Such items would include plastics, aerosol cans, electronic equipment, human waste, metal containers, tires, and batteries. Many service members have complained about health issues including cancer, neurological and reproductive problems, and trouble breathing.

The bill passed with 377 voting yes and 20 no. A little over a year ago, in an I-Team investigation, John White brought you the story of Jennifer Kepner, a Cathedral City resident who served in the Air Force in Iraq. She was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and blamed her cancer on exposure to burn pits. Kepner was an advocate for awareness and putting a stop to the use of burn pits.

Mohawk Tannery talks continue

NASHUA – Potentially radioactive barium, as well as carcinogenic dioxin and arsenic, found at the former Mohawk Tannery led the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to classify it a Superfund site. At least one real estate developer, Bernie Plante, believes he can successfully contain the toxic sludge and construct new apartments and condominiums at the site, which is located along the Nashua River.

Meanwhile, Nashua Mayor Jim Donchess is hoping to gain as much public input as possible regarding how the city and its partners should address the tannery property. Thursday at Amherst Street Elementary School, he met with several residents regarding the ongoing efforts to remediate the property. “I’ve always said we want to hear from the neighborhood as to how they think we should proceed,” Mayor Donchess said. “People have lived with the tannery for a long, long time. Everybody knows that there’s been various committees and the like from the neighborhood that have examined the site over time.”

The property was home to a facility that tanned hides for leather from 1924 to 1984. The EPA hosted two previous public meetings in the city earlier this year on July 25 and August 29, during which officials recommended treating and capping the contaminated soil on site. This method would not result in contractors actually removing the contaminants from the site.

The EPA wants to partner with Plante to turn the site into a 40-acre development, while Plante has said his company would put forth the funds for the majority of the cleanup.

Veterans betrayed again by their government

Susie Belanger of Gansevoort, a tireless fighter for Vietnam veterans denied benefits by the U.S. government, was shocked and frustrated. After a decade of work, the veterans had in June won a rousing victory in Congress — a 382-0 vote for legislation that would restore benefits to “blue water” Navy veterans of Vietnam. Now all they needed was approval in the Senate, and a majority of senators had pledged support.



But then on Sept. 6, the new secretary of Veterans Affairs — Robert Wilkie, a man who had said he was on their side — turned his back on Belanger and the thousands of veterans she fights for. In a letter, Wilkie brought up arguments that Belanger has been countering for years — arguments about the science behind the legislation and the cost of it — and he sent that letter to Sen. Johnny

Isakson of Georgia, chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Now the legislation could stall in committee. Isakson might seek a new study, even though studies have been done and redone. The process could drag out to the end of another Congress at the end of this year, and Belanger and her compatriots could be forced to start over. “I am shocked,” Belanger said of Wilkie’s turnaround. “After listening to him speak at the confirmation hearing, I went up to shake his hand.” She recalled the support blue water veterans had gotten from the previous Veterans Affairs secretary, David Shulkin. “Shulkin was totally behind us. He’s a doctor. He knows what the science says,” she said.

Belanger is a positive person who intimidates the powerful with relentless cheerfulness and a sly sense of humor. But she sounded deflated over Wilkie’s letter. “It’s such a long haul. I saw that and I wanted to ...” her voice trailed off. “I did cry,” she said. Belanger has been working all these years by the side of John Wells, a retired Navy commander who is the director of Military Veterans Advocacy, which works for veterans’ rights through litigation, advocacy, training and education.

Settlement In Lawsuit Over Cancer-Causing Dioxin Runoff From PG&E Utility Poles

SAN FRANCISCO (CBS SF) — An eight-year-old lawsuit filed against PG&E Co. for alleged releases of dioxin from stored utility poles into San Francisco Bay and Humboldt Bay has been settled, according to the environmental group that filed the lawsuit.

The Ecological Rights Foundation, based in Garberville (Humboldt County), alleged in its 2010 lawsuit that dioxin, a chemical that causes cancer and birth defects, was carried by storm water runoff from treated wooden utility poles, sawdust and wood waste into the two bays.

The settlement was signed by U.S. District Judge Richard Seeborg in San Francisco on Friday and announced by the foundation on Monday.

Under the agreement, which will remain in effect through 2026, PG&E will identify storage yards containing treated poles and will test and implement technologies for reducing dioxin runoff to levels that pose lower risk to human health and wildlife.

The technologies could include storage improvements, such as covering poles or keeping them indoors; improvements in storm water treatment; and possibly the use of different materials, such as cement or steel, for utility poles, according to foundation attorney Fredric Evenson.

Evenson said, “Dioxins are among the most toxic chemicals known to science.

Many farmers ignorant of herbicide dangers as calls for banning glyphosate intensify

Monsanto, a global agro-giant acquired by German company Bayer for about \$63 billion in June this year, is soiled in a renew call globally for the ban of the glyphosate, a major ingredient in its Roundupweed-killer.

This started few weeks ago when a landmark US court ruling in San Francisco awarded \$289 million to a man they declared got cancer from Monsanto’s Roundup herbicide.

According to Reuters, “Monsanto faces 8,000 lawsuits’ over its product glyphosate (Roundup weedkiller) adding that the company could face difficult years ahead.

Radio France International (rfi) has quoted the French Environment Minister Nicolas Hulot saying that the verdict marked “the beginning of a war” noting that banning glyphosate within the next three years is one of its “clear engagements.”

The government of Vietnam is renewing call for Monsanto to pay damages to over one million victims of Monsanto and Dow Chemical, which produced the deadly herbicide Agent Orange for the U.S. military during the Vietnam War.

Also, Brazil, one of the largest consumers of Monsanto herbicides is also having a running legal battle over the acceptability of glyphosate.