

Senator Smith offered the following resolution:

Senate Resolution No. 134.

A resolution to urge the Congress of the United States to create the presumption of a service connection for diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure for Vietnam veterans who served in the waters defined by the combat zone and in the airspace over the combat zone.

Whereas, During the Vietnam War, the United States military sprayed 22 million gallons of Agent Orange and other herbicides over Vietnam to reduce forest cover and crops used by the enemy. These herbicides contained dioxin, which has since been identified as carcinogenic and has been linked with a number of serious and disabling illnesses affecting thousands of veterans; and

Whereas, The United States Congress passed the Agent Orange Act of 1991 to address the plight of veterans exposed to herbicides while serving in the Republic of Vietnam. The act presumptively recognizes certain diseases as service-connected among military personnel who served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1975. This presumption has provided access to appropriate disability compensation and medical care for Vietnam veterans diagnosed with illnesses such as type II diabetes, Hodgkin's disease, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, prostate cancer, Parkinson's disease, multiple myeloma, peripheral neuropathy, AL amyloidosis respiratory cancers, and soft tissue sarcomas; and

Whereas, The policy of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is to deny the presumption of a service connection for herbicide-related illnesses to Vietnam veterans who cannot furnish written documentation that they had "boots on the ground" in Vietnam. This makes it virtually impossible for countless United States Navy, Marine, and Air Force veterans to pursue their claims for benefits. Personnel who served on ships in the "Blue Water Navy" in Vietnamese territorial waters were also exposed to dangerous airborne toxins, which not only drifted offshore, but washed into streams and rivers draining into the South China Sea; and

Whereas, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found a higher risk of cancer among United States Navy veterans than other Vietnam veterans. Similarly, a study conducted by the Australian Department of Veterans Affairs found that Vietnam veterans of the Royal Australian Navy had a higher rate of mortality from Agent Orange-associated diseases than did Vietnam veterans from other branches of the military; and

Whereas, The United States Congress should reaffirm the nation's commitment to the well-being of all its veterans and direct the VA to administer the Agent Orange Act under the presumption that herbicide exposure in the Republic of Vietnam occurred in the country's inland waterways, offshore waters, and airspace, encompassing the entire combat zone; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate, That we respectfully urge the Congress of the United States to create the presumption of a service connection for diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure for veterans who served in the waters defined by the combat zone and in the airspace over the combat zone; and be it further

Resolved, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, and the members of the Michigan congressional delegation.