

Thailand Veterans Toxic Exposure Act Senator Boozman

PROBLEM: Current law does not automatically recognize veteran exposure to herbicides while serving in Thailand during the Vietnam Era. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) manual does acknowledge herbicide exposure for specific military occupational specialties (MOS) on the perimeter of eight specific Thai Royal Air Force Bases; however, this provides an additional burden of proof and development upon the VA and veterans to prove their exposure.

SOLUTION: This legislation will expand the scope as it would automatically concede herbicide exposure for all veterans who served at military installations in Thailand during the Vietnam Era, regardless of the base, duty on the perimeter, or MOS. The presumptive diseases currently associated with herbicide exposure would be applicable to all veterans who served at military installations in Thailand during the Vietnam Era.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND: The VA has determined that during the Vietnam era, herbicides were used on the fenced-in perimeters of military bases in Thailand to remove foliage providing cover for enemy forces, as evidenced in a declassified Department of Defense document entitled "*Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report: Base Defense in Thailand.*"

Unfortunately, current VA specifications limit and arbitrarily disqualify veterans who may otherwise be able to prove their exposure to herbicide agents in Thailand and subsequent entitlement to VA benefits.

Furthermore, children with Spina Bifida whose parents were exposed to herbicides during service in Thailand are currently excluded from receiving any benefits while children with Spina Bifida whose parents served in Vietnam and Korea are eligible. This legislation would eliminate that coverage discrepancy by ensuring all children with Spina Bifida whose parents served in Vietnam, Korea, and Thailand are equally entitled to authorized benefits.