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Author Smith, Donald R.

Corporate Author

Report/Article Title Memorandum from Donald R. Smith to Joe Mancias with Subject Agent Orange - Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs -November 18, 1981, dated November 19, 1981

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Description Notes Smith identifies possible issues that will need to be addressed in terms of public affairs.



Veterans
Administration

Memorandum

To: Joe Mancias

Subj: Agent Orange - Senate Committee
on Veterans Affairs - Nov. 18, 1981

Date: November 19, 1981

Joe:

Irréspective of what news media may have picked up as significant in the Agent Orange hearing, the following, I believe, will ultimately have to be addressed inside the agency as far as public affairs issues are concerned:

1) Rather severe criticism of the UCLA proposal itself from numerous witnesses including VA. Consensus seems to be one not of UCLA credibility (except from several protest groups) but one that VA did not allow enough time for proper proposal and further that another 35 days or so is still not enough. VA will have difficulty reconciling the urgency factor if what UCLA comes back with is still not definitive enough. Seems to me the only way to salvage this would be now (not later) give UCLA an extension of time which they could live with and take hits now for "delay" vs hits later -- and again -- for poor quality.

2) VA's AO Registry -- despite Dr. Shepard's attempts to play it down -- is still being given a premier role. The Registry is fraught with loopholes and is a potential disaster area. It was Cleland's idea and one that never was thoroughly thought out. Every time the Registry gets mentioned or a question comes up that one would expect the Registry could answer, we back into a hole.

3) Sen. Mitchell of Maine got assurance from Mr. Nimmo that VA would take a look at what Maine is doing re AO outreach with Mitchell flashing copy of an AO brochure. Expect you'll be asked to assess this publication and their program in terms of its applicability to future VA approach.

4) Our ongoing mortality study was swiped at by GAO which found that data in BIRLS is "not updated frequently enough."

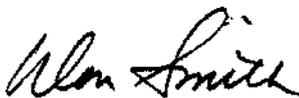
5) On the plus side: the literature analysis was praised from several directions although I think some of the questions raised re directions for future research could very well fuel cause-effect advocates.

→ VA Research Efforts

2.

Agent Orange - Senate Committee
on Veterans Affairs, Nov. 18, 1981

6) All in all, I think the hearing represented a classic instance of politics/public pressure trying to rush science. Almost without exception, the technical people there -- even though not particularly friendly to VA -- came down on the side of time enough to produce quality. As one witness said in response to a question from Sen. Specter, "Despite serious problems with the UCLA proposal, I don't believe any reputable epidemiological institution in the world could have met proper criteria in the time allowed."



DONALD R. SMITH
Area Director (06DC)