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STATE OF ILLINOIS
82ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(1981 - 1982)
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

September 13, 1982

TESTIMONY BEFORE CONGRESSIONAL SUB-COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATING

JOHN T. O'CONNELL, MEMBER, ILLINOIS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Sub-Committee:

My name is John T. O'Connell. I am a member of the Illinois House of Representatives. I serve as Co-Chairman of the Illinois Agent Orange Commission and I, along with Senator Berning, am here to report on the Commission's activities to date.

I would like to state at the outset that a good portion of the final passage debate in the House centered on the appropriate role that Illinois should have in what is in a liability sense, a federal question. Some of my colleagues in the House contended that the determination of causative factors in the exposure to Agent Orange should properly be left to the Federal government. My response to that contention is that in the parlance of a fact finding process, the "adversary is investigating itself." While this is not meant to denigrate the good intentions of the Federal Government in achieving objective determinations, we felt the additional evidence produced by our state commission and other state commissions will bolster the Federal record of evidence and contribute to the overall veracity of your conclusions.

We would also respectfully submit that too much time has transpired before comprehensive, structured testing has taken place in the Veteran Administration's part. Our evidence, even at this early stage in our hearing schedule, indicates that problems do exist. The testimony we have heard thus far has presented a commonality of symptoms ranging from rash outbreak, nervous disorder, mood change to more serious problems such as cancer and genetic defect. We are not at the stage in the evidence gathering, nor do we have the expertise to make any medical determinations when all the evidence is acquired, to say there is any causal factors with Agent Orange; however, we can say to you that these questions of medical disorders have been raised with the VA for years and it has only been recently that serious testing has begun.

TO: Mr. Chairman and Members of the Sub-Committee on Oversight and Investigating
FROM: State Representative John T. O'Connell, Co-Chairman, Agent Orange Commission
September 13, 1982

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We feel that more should have been done to alert Vietnam veterans of the possibilities of ill effects from exposure to this defoliant. I have heard all too often from vets that they never related their problems until they read in a book or saw a television documentary or heard a radio documentary. I have yet to hear that the inquiry into Agent Orange was initiated by the VA. While the VA does have an Agent Orange testing program, we question the effectiveness of such tests that do not include the analysis of tissue. We can state that the VA has not placed such testing on a priority scale at least in one of the Illinois locations we heard testimony. In questioning the person who administered the tests, we discovered he had no formal medical training. This does not contribute to either our belief or, more importantly, the area veterans belief that the VA is doing everything they can. Incidentally, out of the 600 persons tested in this area, not one was found to have symptoms of adverse effects from Agent Orange.

Our concern then is that the VA has had to be pulled into this controversy. Our testimony to this date points to the fact that the VA, at least in Illinois, has been unresponsive to this issue. We feel our citizens deserve better treatment. We hope that you will exercise your congressional muscle to obtain such treatment. We also hope that the answers to questions raised for the last decade will be answered well before 1988.

Respectfully submitted,

John T. O'Connell
State Representative
6th District, Illinois