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***If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?***

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**To:** Shockey, Joni

**Subject:** NEWS: Ross Introduces Expanded Agent Orange Bill to Help Veterans



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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February 2, 2017

## Ross Introduces Expanded Agent Orange Bill to Help Veterans

WASHINGTON, D.C., Feb. 2, 2017 – U.S. Rep. Dennis A. Ross (FL-15), Senior Deputy Majority Whip, made the following statement after introducing the [Fighting for Orange-Stricken Territories in Eastern Regions \(FOSTER\) Act](#), which would provide presumptive Agent Orange exposure status to Vietnam War Era veterans who served in specific areas and show symptoms of medical conditions currently associated with such exposure in order to receive U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits:

**“Nearly every day, I speak to or hear about Vietnam veterans who say they were exposed to Agent Orange, but are unable to receive VA benefits for their diseases associated with this toxic herbicide because the Department of Defense (DOD) does not acknowledge Agent Orange was used in the areas they claim to have been exposed. These brave men and women cannot be denied help any longer, which is why I introduced the **FOSTER Act** to help them qualify for VA benefits.**

**“Currently, the DOD denies Agent Orange was ever used outside of Vietnam and Thailand during the Vietnam War, despite the influx of veterans coming forth with claims of exposure outside of these areas, including Guam. My legislation would grant presumptive Agent Orange exposure status to U.S. service members who served in specific areas outside of Vietnam and Thailand during the Vietnam War and suffer from any of the diseases the U.S. Government has linked to Agent Orange.**

**"I have also requested additional information from the DOD regarding what specific chemicals were used during the Vietnam War, and hope to maintain an open dialogue. I will not let the DOD drag its feet on this or allow a 'deny until they die' attitude toward our courageous veterans. If there is a cover up, we are going to get to the bottom of it. I refuse to forget those who put our lives before their own, like MSgt. Leroy Foster of Lakeland who served in Guam during the Vietnam War."**

**"It is downright heartbreaking and shocking to hear these veterans list off their myriad of ailments and life-threatening conditions, knowing our government isn't providing them any relief even after they selflessly put their lives on the line to serve and defend our nation. We must quickly provide them the help and services they deserve."**

#### **The FOSTER Act:**

- This legislation would grant presumptive Agent Orange exposure status to U.S. service members who served in Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands or American Samoa during the Vietnam War.
- This would enable eligible veterans to receive expedited consideration for VA benefits if they suffer from any of the diseases the U.S. Government has linked to Agent Orange.
- This legislation is named after **MSgt. Leroy Foster** of Lakeland, who claims he personally sprayed Agent Orange in Guam while serving at Andersen Air Force Base during the Vietnam War. MSgt. Foster claims he has more than 30 diseases and multiple cancers due to his exposure to Agent Orange in Guam, but does not qualify for VA benefits for his ailments under current law.
- Rep. Ross additionally sent letters to former U.S. Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry and House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe requesting a briefing and information on the use of Agent Orange in Guam.
- Rep Ross' staff met with the DOD two weeks ago, and requested more information on specific chemicals, herbicides and pesticides used during the Vietnam War after the Air Force maintained its position that Agent Orange was not used outside of Vietnam and Thailand.

#### Agent Orange in the Vietnam War:

- Between 1962 and 1971, the U.S. military sprayed Agent Orange and other herbicides on trees and vegetation that provided enemy cover during the Vietnam War.
- More than 19 million gallons of various "rainbow" herbicide combinations were sprayed, but Agent Orange was the combination the U.S. military used most often.
- The Agent Orange Act of 1991 (AOA) empowered the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to declare certain illnesses "presumptive" to exposure to Agent Orange and enabled veterans to receive disability compensation for these related conditions. This "presumptive policy" simplifies the process for receiving compensation for these diseases since VA foregoes the normal requirements of proving that an illness began during or was worsened by military service.

- Only veterans who actually stepped foot on Vietnamese soil are extended the presumption of coverage.
  
- The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) currently states Agent Orange was not used outside of Vietnam and Thailand.
  
- If veterans' diseases and/or exposure locations fall outside of the current VA lists of confirmed diseases and exposure locations, the veterans must show an actual connection between the disease and herbicide exposure during military service. There is no presumption in such cases, and many claims are denied.
  
- DOD acknowledged exposure by location (presumptive status confirmed for VA benefits):
  - On land or inland waterways of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975.
  - U.S. Navy and Coast Guard Ships with operations in Vietnam between Jan 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975.
  - Along demilitarized zones in Korea between April 1, 1968 and Aug. 31, 1971.
  
- Case-by-case exposure (presumptive status unconfirmed for VA benefits):
  - Herbicide residue in C-123 planes flown after the Vietnam War.
  - Blue Water Veterans (open sea ships off the shore of Vietnam during the Vietnam War).
  - Thailand Military Bases between Feb. 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975.
  - Tests and storage at military bases in the United States and locations in other countries.
  
- Diseases include, but are not limited to, heart disease, multiple cancers, diabetes, Hodgkin's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, and birth defects.

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