

Duckworth urges Senate to finally give “Blue Water” Vietnam Veterans the health care they’ve earned

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Combat Veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) delivered a speech on the Senate floor today detailing the grave injustice that has been done to the nearly 90,000 “Blue Water” Vietnam Veterans who are currently unable to receive the health care needed to treat diseases linked to wartime Agent Orange exposure. Duckworth called on her fellow Senators to right this wrong by passing without delay the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act*, which is already co-sponsored by a majority of the Senate. Video of the speech is available [here](#).

“We made a promise to these Veterans: fight for us overseas, then we’ll fight for you when you get back home; when you step back onto U.S. soil, we’ll bandage the wounds you earned in combat, making sure you never feel that you sacrificed in vain,” Duckworth said. “I’m ashamed to say that that promise has been broken. It’s long past time we pass legislation ensuring these heroes aren’t left in pain... before even one more dies a preventable death on our watch.”

A full copy of Duckworth’s remarks as prepared for delivery are below:

Right now, tens of thousands of American heroes are suffering—even dying—while some folks in government are looking the other way, refusing to heed their calls for help.

Our “Blue Water” Veterans answered the call when their nation needed them in the thick of the Vietnam War:

They left their loved ones... boarded ships... fought the Viet Kong... risking their lives hours after hour, day after day, in service to the country they loved.

We made a promise to them: fight for us overseas, then we'll fight for you when you get back home. When you step back onto U.S. soil, we'll bandage the wounds you earned in combat, making sure you never feel that you sacrificed in vain.

I'm ashamed to say that that promise has been broken.

For more than a decade now, our government has refused to give them the health care and disability benefits needed to treat diseases linked to Agent Orange exposure—despite the fact that they serviced the very aircrafts that sprayed and spread the chemical... despite that they breathed in air and brushed their teeth with water that was likely laced with the poison.

Those same health care benefits have been extended to *other* troops who fought in the same war during the same years.

But because these Blue Water Veterans fought the enemy on the water rather than on Vietnam soil itself, our government won't lift a finger to help stop their suffering.

Tell me that's fair.

Tell me that makes a shred of sense.

Tell me that our nation should abandon the heroes who risked their lives for the rest of us... that we should leave them to die from cancer, or heart disease, or the litany of other illnesses we know this chemical causes.

Look, I've also gone to war—and just as those Americans lost their health, I lost my legs for this country. But from the moment I woke up in Walter Reed, I knew that the VA would give me the care I needed to recover.

These nearly 90,000 Veterans deserve the same. It's long past time we pass legislation ensuring these heroes aren't left in pain.

Unfortunately, legislation that would recognize their sacrifice suffered a setback last week. But with the time remaining in this Congress, we still have the chance to help make these Veterans whole. To do the right thing. The obvious thing. The American thing.

So to every one of my fellow Senators, please:

If we actually want to honor their service, we can't just give them an ovation on Veterans Day. We need to take action to help them lead full, healthy lives every other day of the year, too.

Right now that means joining me in working to pass the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act*—before even one more hero dies a preventable death on our watch.