

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 30, 2015

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

We write to express our utmost concern regarding recent press reports that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has failed to provide benefits to the survivors of horrific mustard gas testing on U.S. troops during World War II by the Department of Defense. Reporting by National Public Radio (NPR) indicates that despite assurances from the VA following the declassification of these records over twenty years ago, many survivors have still not been contacted and still many others have reportedly continued to be rejected for health care and other VA benefits.

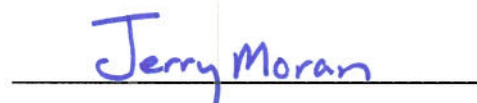
We find these reports profoundly disturbing and urge the VA to take immediate and comprehensive steps to address this issue, and review its associated processes to better handle similar cases in the future. First, we recommend the VA thoroughly review all records associated with this incident; proactively contact each identifiable veteran; and immediately assist with any outstanding, denied, or desired application for benefits or health care stemming from this exposure. We also request the Department review its investigation process to determine how NPR reporters were able to locate 1,200 affected veterans over a period of weeks, while the VA only identified half that number over the past 20 years. Finally, we urge the Department to review its disability claim adjudication process associated with presumptive connection to chemical exposure to determine why numerous veterans that reportedly meet the eligibility criteria have faced multiple rejections including on appeal.

These brave veterans were subjected to horrifying abuse that has scarred many of them both physically and mentally. Every effort needs to be made immediately to ensure they're finally getting the health benefits they are owed. To that end, we request that you provide our offices with a plan to meet the objectives outlined above at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your continued service to our nation.

Sincerely,





Richard Blumenfeld

Brian Schatz

Bill Nelson

Barbara A Mikulski

Edward J. Markey

Mark

Kirsten Gillibrand

Bob Casey, Jr.

Joe Donnelly

Chuck Schumer