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Report/Article Title Comments from James Stockdale, Deputy Undersecretary for Intergovernmental Affairs, Department of Health and Human Services, Chairman, Agent Orange Working Group, to National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Conference, American Legion, regarding, Agent Orange Update, dated February 15, 1982, Capital Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C.

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COMMENTS: JAMES STOCKDALE
DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY FOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
CHAIRMAN: AGENT ORANGE WORKING GROUP

TO: NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION CONFERENCE
AMERICAN LEGION

DATE: FEBRUARY 15, 1982

PLACE: CAPITAL HILTON HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.

SUBJECT: AGENT ORANGE UPDATE

(ACKNOWLEDGE INTRODUCTION AND COMMENT ON CHAIRMAN LENKER.)

SINCE I'VE BEEN HERE IN WASHINGTON I'VE HAD THE PLEASURE OF MEETING WITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MYLIO KRAJA; NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION DIRECTOR, BOB LYNCH; AND JOHN SOMMER, WHO HAS JUST RECENTLY BEEN PROMOTED TO DEPUTY DIRECTOR TO BOB.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO RECOGNIZE THE AGGRESSIVE AND THOUGHTFUL SUPPORT THAT THE AMERICAN LEGION HAS GIVEN TO THE VETERANS OF THE VIETNAM WAR IN REGARD TO THE ISSUE OF EXPOSURE TO AGENT ORANGE.

I REFER TO THE 1978 RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT STUDIES, RESEARCH AND ASSISTANCE TO VETERANS EXPOSED; TO THE 1979 RESOLUTION URGING THE V.A. ADMINISTRATOR, ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AND OTHERS TO MOVE WITHOUT DELAY TO DETERMINE THE EFFECTS OF AGENT ORANGE ON EXPOSED VETERANS, AND THE MANY OTHER INITIATIVES DESIGNED TO BRING THE MESSAGE OF URGENCY TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE DEEP CONCERNS OF VIETNAM VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

ONE OF THE IMPORTANT SERVICES OF THE LEGION IN THIS REGARD IS THE EXCELLENT SERIES "AGENT ORANGE, IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS"

THAT IS CURRENTLY APPEARING IN ISSUES OF THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL MAGAZINE. JOHN SOMMER, JERRY ATCHESON AND OTHERS WHO HAVE PRODUCED THE SERIES HAVE DONE AN EXCELLENT JOB.

IN ADDITION TO THE OTHER GOOD THINGS ABOUT THE ARTICLES, THEY SPELLED MY NAME RIGHT AND QUOTED ME CORRECTLY.

THE TITLE "AGENT ORANGE, IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS," ACCURATELY REFLECTS WHAT THE AGENT ORANGE WORKING GROUP IS ALL ABOUT, TOO.

WHILE WE DO NOT CONDUCT ANY RESEARCH, THE WORKING GROUP IS CHARGED WITH BEING THE OVERALL COORDINATOR, CLEARING-HOUSE AND EVALUATOR OF THE FEDERAL RESEARCH EFFORT. UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THE WORKING GROUP, ALL OF THE FEDERAL AGENCIES INVOLVED IN RESEARCH AND POLICY RELATED TO AGENT ORANGE AND OTHER HERBICIDES USED IN VIETNAM, ARE DRAWN TOGETHER AND WORK TOGETHER. AS CHAIRMAN, I WILL INSIST THAT THAT WORK GO FORWARD AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE; THAT THERE BE NO HINT OF POLITICAL GAMEPLAYING; AND THAT CONCLUSIONS REACHED WILL BE PROVIDED ACCURATELY TO SECRETARY SCHWEIKER'S CABINET COUNCIL ON HUMAN RESOURCES SO THAT, IF NEED BE, OUR ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS CAN DEVELOP POLICY BASED ON SCIENTIFICALLY SUPPORTABLE FACTS.

THE AMERICAN LEGION, I'M PROUD TO SAY, IS ONE OF THE RESPONSIBLE VETERANS GROUPS WHICH HAS SUPPORTED LEGITIMATE RESEARCH AND THE NEED TO UNCOVER, NOT MYTHS, BUT VALID INFORMATION BORNE OF THAT RESEARCH.

THAT NEED TO UNCOVER VALID INFORMATION AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE FOR THE BENEFIT OF VIETNAM VETERANS WAS WHAT PROMPTED PRESIDENT REAGAN, LAST JULY, TO UPGRADE THE VISIBILITY AND "CLOUT" OF THE AGENT ORANGE WORKING GROUP.

HE RAISED THE WORKING GROUP TO CABINET COUNCIL REPORTING STATUS AND EXPANDED ITS MEMBERSHIP AND FUNDING SOURCES. WE NOW HAVE A MEMBER OF THE WHITE HOUSE STAFF AS WELL AS A REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET TAKING PART IN THE MONTHLY MEETINGS OF THE AGENT ORANGE WORKING GROUP, AS WELL AS ALL FEDERAL AGENCIES INVOLVED IN DIOXIN RESEARCH AND VETERANS AFFAIRS.

FURTHER, BECAUSE OF THE GROWING INTEREST OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN OUR WORK, WE ARE GOING TO ADD A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE TO THE MEMBERSHIP.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SECRETARY DICK SCHWEIKER, WHO IS HEAD OF THE CABINET COUNCIL ON HUMAN RESOURCES...AND THE MAN TO WHOM THE WORKING GROUP REPORTS...HAS EXHIBITED AN INTENSE INTEREST IN THIS MATTER.

HE HOLDS THE STRONG BELIEF THAT THE PUBLIC AND VETERANS GROUPS HAVE A RIGHT TO BE QUICKLY ADVISED OF IMPORTANT NEW INFORMATION. YOU MAY RECALL THAT LAST SEPTEMBER 23RD, SECRETARY SCHWEIKER WENT BEFORE THE NEWS MEDIA AND ANNOUNCED THE VERIFICATION OF THE FACT THAT ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS, AGENT ORANGE HAD BEEN DUMPED ON AMERICAN MILITARY INSTALLATIONS IN VIETNAM. THESE DUMPINGS RESULTED FROM THE NEED TO LIGHTEN LOAD BY SPRAY AIRCRAFT WHICH HAD OCCASIONALLY LOST POWER ON TAKE-OFF.

THIS NEW INFORMATION CONFIRMED WHAT HAD BEEN ONLY SPECULATION AND OPENED THE POSSIBILITY OF IDENTIFYING A LARGE, POTENTIALLY EXPOSED GROUP OF PEOPLE AS AN AID TO MORE VALID RESEARCH. HE REVEALED THIS INFORMATION IMMEDIATELY UPON LEARNING OF IT.

SECRETARY SCHWEIKER IS CONVINCED THAT THE PUBLIC, ESPECIALLY VIETNAM VETERANS, HAS A NEED FOR INFORMATION AND, INDEED, HAS EVERY RIGHT TO KNOW.

THAT'S THE KIND OF SUPPORT THE WORKING GROUP IS GETTING FROM THE SECRETARY AND THE ADMINISTRATION.

THERE IS A STRONG SENSE OF URGENCY AS WELL AS A RECOGNITION THAT LEGITIMATE RESEARCH TAKES TIME.

I RECOGNIZE ALSO THAT VIETNAM VETERANS CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO WAIT FOREVER FOR ANSWERS.

SINCE BECOMING CHAIRMAN I HAVE MADE IT VERY CLEAR THAT FOOT-DRAGGING AND BUREAUCRATIC DELAYS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. IN THIS REGARD I AM PLEASED TO HAVE THE COMPLETE SUPPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE FEDERAL SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY.

THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HAS COME UNDER HEAVY FIRE FOR WHAT WAS PERCEIVED AS UNRESPONSIVENESS TO THE CONCERNS OF VETERANS RELATING TO AGENT ORANGE. I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THAT PERCEPTION IS CHANGING. TO SUPPORT THAT, CHUCK HAGEL

HAS BEEN RECENTLY NAMED AS DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR. CHUCK IS A PURPLE HEART VIETNAM COMBAT VETERAN. HE HAS ALREADY EXPANDED THE STAFF AND SPACE RELATED TO THE AGENT ORANGE ISSUE AND HAS SERVED NOTICE THAT THE FULL RESOURCES OF THE V.A. WILL BE DIRECTED TOWARD PROVIDING VALID ANSWERS BASED ON ACCELERATED RESEARCH, AND TOWARD DISPELLING THE CHARGE THAT THE V.A. HAS BEEN UNRESPONSIVE TO THE CONCERNS OF VETERANS ABOUT AGENT ORANGE.

MEANWHILE, THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE ARMY RECORDS SEARCH DIVISION IS CURRENTLY DEVELOPING SOME HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT DATA. THE DETAILS ARE NOT, AS YET, COMPLETE. I CAN SAY THAT THE POSSIBILITY EXISTS THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF VIETNAM VETERANS, EXPOSED AND RELATIVELY UNEXPOSED, MAY BE IDENTIFIED FOR PURPOSES OF A RELIABLE RESEARCH COHORT. WE ARE VIEWING THAT WITH GUARDED OPTIMISM BECAUSE IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY VALUABLE TO THE CONDUCT OF THE CONGRESSIONALLY-MANDATED VETERANS ADMINISTRATION EPIDEMIOLOGY STUDY.

AFTER SOME DELAYS, THE U.C.L.A. PROTOCOL FOR THAT STUDY HAS BEEN REWORKED, RESUBMITTED, AND IS CURRENTLY UNDER REVIEW BY THE AGENT ORANGE WORKING GROUP SCIENCE PANEL AND OTHER AGENCY SCIENTISTS, AS WELL AS THE CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY

ASSESSMENT. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE REVIEW PROCESS WILL WEED OUT ANY POSSIBILITY OF BIAS OR WEAKNESS IN THE PROTOCOL, WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY A COOKBOOK RECIPE ON HOW THE ACTUAL STUDY WILL BE CONDUCTED. WE WISH TO MOVE RAPIDLY AND RESPONSIBLY SO THAT THE ACTUAL STUDY AND RESEARCH CAN BEGIN.

IN ADDITION, THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF RESEARCH UNDERWAY. BART KULL WILL SHORTLY PROVIDE YOU WITH AN UPDATE OF VARIOUS STUDIES.

IN CLOSING, I WOULD RESTATE MY POSITION, AND THAT OF SECRETARY SCHWEIKER AND THE ADMINISTRATION... "THE CONCERNS OF POSSIBLE LONG-TERM ADVERSE HEALTH EFFECTS AS A RESULT OF EXPOSURE TO AGENT ORANGE ARE VERY REAL. THEY DEMAND ANSWERS. THEY DEMAND THE KIND OF DELIBERATE, OBJECTIVE RESEARCH THAT WILL PROVIDE AS MANY ANSWERS AS SCIENCE CAN GIVE."

WE ARE DEDICATED TO THAT END...REGARDLESS OF ITS IMPLICATIONS.

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU AGAIN FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE AMERICAN LEGION IN OUR EFFORTS.

THANK YOU.