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

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## **Kuster Helps Introduce Legislation Benefitting Vietnam-Era Veterans**

(Washington, DC) – Today, Congresswoman Annie Kuster (NH-02) joined Representatives Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Penn.), Scott Tipton (R-Colo.), Elise Stefanik (R-N.Y.), Joe Cunningham (D-S.C.), Brendan Boyle (D-Penn.) and Mike Thompson (D-Calif.) to introduce the Keeping Our Promises Act, a bill that would add nine medical conditions recognized by the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) as having evidence of exposure to certain herbicides used by the Armed Forces during the Vietnam War.

Military personnel involved with the storage and transportation suffered severe rates of exposure to this chemical. Despite constant reassurance that it was safe and harmless to handle during the war, veterans began reporting symptoms of lymphoma, leukemia, respiratory cancer, prostate cancer, bladder cancer, digestive disorders and other diseases.

“Too many veterans have faced challenges in accessing the care they need for exposure to toxic chemicals during their service,” said Kuster. “This is unacceptable. Thousands of U.S. service members were exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War and for too long they have been denied the support they deserve. I’m pleased to join my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to introduce this much-needed legislation and I will continue my work to help ensure all our service members receive the benefits they have earned.”

“I’ve heard from veterans across my district who are suffering from long-term illnesses as a result of Agent Orange exposure but can’t receive VA benefits for their ailments. I believe we owe these men and women who served our country much-needed assistance for medical bills and other essentials. This legislation is a bipartisan solution to an imminent need, and I’m grateful for my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have put party differences aside to assist veterans,” Westerman said.

“Congress’s most solemn obligation is to ensure that our nation’s veterans have the care and resources they need. American heroes affected by Agent Orange deserve the peace of mind knowing that the federal government recognizes the existing link between their exposure and illness. I am proud to support this bipartisan legislation to ensure that those who defended our freedom receive the health care to which they have earned,” Fitzpatrick said.

“Congress has a responsibility to ensure all veterans receive the benefits they are entitled to. VA benefits for thousands of veterans and their children who suffered from detrimental health side effects due to herbicidal agent exposure during the Vietnam War are long overdue. There is sufficient data regarding the locations of Agent Orange storage in Thailand and elsewhere during the war and I am happy to see action taken to compensate our veterans and their families,” Tipton said.

“Lowcountry veterans who bravely served their country during Vietnam are now suffering debilitating and long-term illnesses because of their exposure to Agent Orange under the government’s watch. This bipartisan legislation would make sure the men and women exposed to these harmful chemicals receive the care, services, and benefits they are owed. I am proud to work with my colleagues across the aisle to advance this important legislation and ensure our veterans receive the treatment they deserve,” Cunningham said.

“This long-awaited administrative step would help tens of thousands of veterans get access to the care they need and deserve. We made a promise to our veterans: they served this country, and in return, we’d always have their backs. This bipartisan legislation makes good on that promise by ensuring all service members exposed to these herbicides and chemicals as a part of their military service get the health care they need. Not one more service member should be forced to suffer in this way without the best care our federal government has to offer,” Boyle said.

“I’m proud to introduce this bipartisan bill to ensure veterans suffering because of exposure to Agent Orange can access the medical care and other assistance that they need and that they deserve,” Thompson said.

U.S. Air Force records show that at least 6,542 spraying missions took place, and by 1971, the U.S. had sprayed 12 percent of the total area of South Vietnam with the defoliating chemicals, at an average concentration of 13 times the recommended rate for domestic use.

The nine new classifications included in the Keeping Our Promises Act are based on NAM’s biennial Veterans and Agent Orange (VAO) Committee’s evaluation of epidemiologic literature and reflect the committee members’ judgement of the relative certainty of the association between the illness and exposure to the herbicides used in Vietnam.