
National Gulf War Resource Center

2611 SW 17th Street
Topeka, KS 66604
Toll Free (866) 531-7183
Fax: 785-235-6531
HQ@ngwrc.org



www.ngwrc.org

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Chief of Staff John R. Gingrich
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Gingrich,

I am writing you note only as the Chief of Staff of the Department of Veterans Affairs; but also as your roll as the Chairman of the Department of Veterans Affairs Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Task Force and the important tack I ask of you to help in the elimination of the presumptive period found in relevant parts of 38 U.S.C. 1117 & 1118 and amended under CFR 3.317.

As an advocate of veterans throughout this great nation, and as a veteran myself, I feel that it is of the utmost importance that I remind you of the rapidly approaching expiration date for the presumptive period established for illnesses associated with service in the Persian Gulf War. December 31, 2011 (the date established under the Persian Gulf War Veterans' Benefit Act of 1994 as amended by the "*Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001*," PL 107-103 and codified in relevant parts of 38 U.S.C. 1117 & 1118 and amended under CFR 3.317) is the last day that thousands of sick veterans will qualify for access to medical and other disability benefits afforded them for their selfless sacrifices on one of the most toxic battlefields that this country has ever fought on.

More than 697,000 Americans participated in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. According to the VA's Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses, by November 2009 over one in four of these veterans were afflicted with chronic illnesses that are directly related to their wartime service. Many more are expected to fall ill in the coming years.

There are a number of compelling reasons why the December 2011 expiration date should be removed from the law;

- The United States still has troops deployed to the region; exposed to many of the same hazards that Persian Gulf War veterans were exposed to and as a result may also become ill in the coming years.
- As was stated in the Federal Registry (document number E-723545, pages 68506-68508), the reason for the last presumptive period extension by the Secretary was because "*scientific uncertainty* remains regarding the causes of Gulf War veterans' illnesses." At this point it is very safe to say that "*scientific uncertainty*" still remains regarding Gulf War Illnesses.

- The chronic nature of these illnesses makes it very likely that they will last for many years, if not for the lifetime of those afflicted.
- I would like to point out that veterans from the Vietnam War experienced many of the same obstacles during their fight for treatment and disability compensation for exposures to certain commercial herbicides that were used on the battlefield. And while Vietnam veterans were exposed to just one class of toxic chemical, it is a well-known fact that Gulf War veterans were exposed to many different classes of toxic chemicals. Veterans from the toxic war of Vietnam do not have to face a deadline for most all of their illnesses that manifested from their exposures. So why do you ask it from Gulf War veterans?

I assist veterans on a daily basis that are still discovering that the ailments that they have are very likely due to their service in the Persian Gulf War. I still see veterans that have had their lives turned upside-down because they've been sick and haven't been able to live as they once lived. There are soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines that are still coming home from the region that have been exposed to the hazards that will very likely make these troops sick and therefore will need help that the Veterans' Administration provides. Until science can ascertain the reason for the mysterious illnesses, until there is a cure for the illnesses, and even until prevention is put into place so that not one more veteran will get these illnesses, we can't shut the door on our heroes by expiring their benefits.

So I urge you all to please remove the December 31, 2011 expiration date from the law so that Gulf War veterans and future veterans can continue to receive the much-needed care and benefits that they have sacrificed so much to earn. It is time to stop moving the expiration date as has been the case over the year.

There is no expiration date for American heroism; no more than there should be an expiration date for recognizing the injuries and illnesses that are often associated with it.

Sincerely,

James A. Bunker

James A. Bunker
Executive Director
National Gulf War Resource Center
2611 SW 17th Street
Topeka, KS 66604
785-221-0162
Toll free 866-531-7183