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October 2, 2008

Honorable Gordon R. England
Deputy Secretary of Defense
Co-chairman, DoD/VA Senior Oversight Committee
1010 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield
Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Co-chairman, DoD/VA Senior Oversight Committee
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary England and Secretary Mansfield,

I am writing to you, as Co-chairmen of the DoD/VA Senior Oversight Committee (SOC), about an issue that involves both Departments which I believe would benefit from review and input by the SOC.

In recent months, the Committee has heard from various parties who have expressed concerns about situations and locations where servicemembers may have been exposed to environmental toxins, such as at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, or the Naval Air Facility at Atsugi, Japan.

I would appreciate your providing me with information concerning how DoD identifies locations where possible exposure to environmental toxins took place, what steps DOD is taking to identify individuals who may have been exposed to such hazards, how information on such exposures is transmitted to VA, and what policies and procedures VA has in place to ensure that relevant information is used for the adjudication of claims for service-connection based on environmental toxin exposure.

Among the locations that have been brought to the Committee's attention, some of which the Environmental Protection Agency may have already investigated, are:

- Camp Lejeune, North Carolina
- Fort McClellan, Alabama
- Naval Air Facility, Atsugi, Japan.
- Air Force bases in Thailand during the Vietnam era for herbicide exposure

I would appreciate the SOC's views on how DOD and VA, separately and jointly, are identifying areas of possible environmental toxin exposure and related health effects and how the two departments identify and contact potentially exposed veterans. I am also interested in learning how veterans whose participation in classified activities resulting in environmental exposure are able to obtain evidence of such exposure from DOD in order to substantiate a claim for VA service-connected benefits.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel K. Akaka". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Daniel" being the most prominent part.

Daniel K. Akaka
U.S. Senator