

Utah Senator Stops Blue Water Navy Bill

VFW says ‘We don’t need more sick veterans to prove sufficient evidence’

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WASHINGTON — The objection by Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) to passing H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018, by unanimous consent today on the Senate floor has effectively doomed any chance of the bill being passed in the 115th Congress. Lee now joins Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), who objected last week due to the bill’s overall cost. Lee’s objection was because he wants to wait and see more sufficient evidence.

“We don’t need more sick veterans to prove sufficient evidence,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. “Agent Orange made Vietnam veterans sick, and science agrees that there isn’t any reason to treat so-called Blue Water Navy veterans any different than their peers who served ashore or on the inland waterways of Vietnam,” he said. “What both senators have done is fail thousands of veterans — many of whom reside in their home states. Their obstruction to this bill’s passage forsakes our nation’s promise to take care of those who were injured or made ill due to their military service. Their objections put cost above faithful and honorable service.”

The VFW-supported H.R. 299 would have restored VA benefits to some 90,000 Blue Water Navy veterans who had their disability eligibility taken away in 2002 after regulatory changes. The bill would have also helped other veterans and their families who suffer from conditions related to toxic exposures. Veterans exposed to Agent Orange while serving along the Korean DMZ could have had an earlier start date to encompass the timeframe when various defoliants were tested. The current start date of April 1, 1968, would have been backed up seven months to Sept. 1, 1967. In addition, benefits would have been expanded to include children born with spina bifida due to a parent’s exposure in Thailand. Coverage for this condition already exists for the children of Vietnam and Korean DMZ veterans. The legislation would have also required the VA to report on research being conducted on a broad range of conditions possibly related to service in Southwest Asia, which is important for future legislative efforts to create a list of presumptive conditions for veterans seeking

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VA health care and benefits related to toxic substance exposure, such as burn pits.

“Senator Lee’s insistence to wait for more sufficient evidence jeopardizes the chance of H.R. 299 — or any future bill like it — from ever passing while these veterans are still alive,” said Lawrence. “Senator Lee, just like Senator Enzi did last week, failed to use this opportunity to put tens of thousands of forgotten veterans who were exposed to toxic substances, and many of their children who sadly inherited a toxic legacy, first in their priorities,” he said. “The VFW nor its members will forget this.”

The VFW is again calling on all members and advocates to demand that the Senate pass H.R. 299 before the end of the year. [**Make your voices heard here.**](#)