



Holds hearing to address concerns of veterans exposed to Agent Orange, water contamination

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, called for increased scientific research and collaboration to study the adverse effects of toxic chemical exposures on veterans.

At an oversight hearing held to examine the impact of exposure to toxic chemicals, particularly veterans exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War and water contamination at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, Isakson stressed the importance of having a standardized, scientific approach at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to determine which veterans should receive disability benefits based on their exposure to toxic chemicals.

"It's very important that we have a thorough examination of what it takes to get to a presumptive conclusion that a disease or a disability has been caused by a [toxic chemical] association and that it be as scientific as it can be so it's absolutely, unequivocally clear," said Isakson.

Isakson questioned David McLenachen, VA Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Disability Assistance, on the VA's level of collaboration with organizations such as the National Institute of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"You can have all the great research institutions in the world, but if they're not communicating, they're not coordinating [and] if there's not a unified mission, then you never get a result," said Isakson.

In addition, the hearing examined efforts to expand disability benefits for veterans who served in ships offshore Vietnam, also known as the "Blue Water Navy Veterans," who may have been exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange, and health conditions associated with water contamination at Camp Lejeune for both veterans and their children.

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The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs is chaired by U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., in the 114th Congress.

Isakson is a veteran himself – having served in the Georgia Air National Guard from 1966-1972 – and has been a member of the Senate VA Committee since he joined the Senate in 2005. Isakson's home state of Georgia is home to more than a dozen military installations representing each branch of the military as well as more than 750,000 veterans.