

United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400
(202) 224-5364

June 25, 2015

Secretary Robert A. McDonald
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I am writing regarding troubling reports of the Department of Veterans Affairs' failure to live up to its promises to compensate veterans exposed to the U.S. military's mustard gas experiments during World War II.

After the U.S. military declassified the mustard gas experiments that it conducted on its servicemen, the VA issued new guidance and regulations in 1991 and 1992 that were intended to make the process of receiving compensation more fair for veterans who were victims of these horrific experiments. In a January 5, 1993 letter to the Department of Defense, VA Acting Secretary Anthony Principi also acknowledged the VA's responsibility to provide for these veterans and promised to make every effort to locate and notify those who were exposed to the military's mustard gas experiments.¹

This week, however, it was reported that not only has the VA failed to live up to its promises, it has actively fought attempts by these veterans to collect compensation for their permanent and often severe injuries.² According to the report, in more than 20 years, the VA has attempted to reach just 610 of roughly 60,000 servicemen exposed to these experiments with a single letter sent in the mail, claiming that incomplete records prevented additional outreach. But a National Public Radio research librarian located more than 1,200 of these servicemen in just two months using the VA's own records. The report also included details of how the VA has denied claims from veterans who met the VA compensation requirements, often issuing denials for years, sometimes decades.

If these allegations are true, it is extremely troubling that the federal government is shirking its basic duty to provide for those who have served our country in war, especially when these veterans have been subjected to purposeful, immeasurable, and permanent harm by our own military. Therefore, I request a briefing to the Aging Committee staff about what steps the

¹ *Chemical Weapons Exposure Project, Summary of Actions and Projects 1993-2007*,
Department of Defense

² *The VA's Broken Promise to Thousands of Vets Exposed to Mustard Gas*, National Public
Radio (June 23, 2015)

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VA has taken to appropriately care for and compensate these veterans. I request that this briefing take place no later than July 10, 2015.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please contact Cathy Yu on the Aging Committee staff at (202) 224-7752 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Claire McCaskill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Claire" being more prominent and the last name "McCaskill" following in a similar style.

Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member

cc: Susan Collins
Chairman