

The Honorable Ash Carter  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

July 7, 2016

Dear Secretary Carter:

I am writing regarding troubling reports of another instance in which the Defense Department knowingly exposed its troops to highly toxic substances and subsequently failed to acknowledge the harm that these troops endured as a result of exposure during their service.

The New York Times recently reported on a 1966 nuclear accident involving the Air Force, one of the biggest nuclear accidents in history.<sup>1</sup> According to the article, after four hydrogen bombs fell out of the sky due to an U.S. Air Force plane crash, around 1,600 Air Force troops were deployed to clean up the radiation contamination in the Spanish countryside. Due to the time-sensitive and public relations-sensitive nature of the cleanup, the Air Force failed to provide its troops with adequate protection from radiation; in fact, the article states that in the early days of the cleanup, many troops had no protection whatsoever as they spent extended time in fields drenched with radioactive plutonium. The article also included details of how the Air Force went to extreme lengths to hide the fact that the radiation was harmful, including feeding its troops food from the radioactive fields after the Spanish government forced the U.S. to purchase the crops because of radiation contamination. According to the article, high percentages of these troops have developed serious cancers and other illnesses since the cleanup. The Air Force, however, has not acknowledged that these troops were exposed to toxic levels of radiation, hampering these veterans' ability to obtain healthcare and benefits.

After the many months my office has spent investigating the VA's and Defense Department's failure to acknowledge the harm done to veterans who were purposefully exposed to mustard gas by the U.S. Military, I find it extremely troubling to hear reports of yet another failure by the Defense Department to acknowledge the extreme harm its troops suffered as a result of toxic exposure while serving their country. I am writing to request a briefing for my staff about the accident described in the New York Times article and the radiation exposure experienced by troops deployed to the area. In addition, given the article's claims that the Defense Department has failed to take these veterans' suffering seriously and failed to acknowledge that it is responsible for exposing them to toxic radiation, I request that the briefing include information regarding what steps the Department has taken, if any, to ensure that

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<sup>1</sup> *Decades Later, Sickness Among Airmen After a Hydrogen Bomb Accident*, The New York Times (June 19, 2016)

affected troops are properly recognized. I request that this briefing take place no later than July 15, 2016.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please contact Nick Rawls on my staff at (202) 228-6472 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Claire McCaskill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "C" and "M".

Claire McCaskill