

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
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AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE
ON INVESTIGATIONS
RANKING MEMBER
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
RANKING MEMBER

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

July 7, 2016

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I am writing regarding troubling reports of another failure by the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide care for veterans who endured toxic exposure with crippling side effects.

The New York Times recently reported on a 1966 nuclear accident involving the Air Force, one of the biggest nuclear accidents in history.¹ 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 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, but the VA has not provided them with healthcare benefits because it does not recognize the exposure during the cleanup as harmful.

After the many months my office has spent investigating the VA's failure to provide healthcare and benefits to its 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 VA to carry out its duty to care for this country's veterans. I am writing to request a briefing for my staff regarding the accident described in the New York Times article, the radiation exposure experienced by troops deployed to the area. In addition, given the article's claims that the VA has failed to adequately provide for these veterans I would like to know what, if anything, the

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

VA has done to provide health benefits for these veterans. 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.

Claire McCaskill