

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 18, 2016

The Honorable Shaun Donovan  
Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
1725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Donovan:

We write to you with concerns about the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) proposed rule that addresses diseases associated with exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, NC (RIN: 2900-AP66). This proposed rule is currently pending review with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and we are concerned about further delays in approving this rule. Please understand that further delay in approving this rule will cause significant harm to the well-being of thousands of disabled veterans.

From 1953 to 1987, nearly one million servicemembers and their family members were poisoned by contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune, NC. In 2012, Congress passed, and the President signed into law, H.R. 1627, the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-154). This law provides health care for Camp Lejeune veterans and their families who are suffering from a variety of medical conditions associated with exposure to the contaminated water. However, the law did not address disability compensation and presumptions of service-connected disabilities because VA had to address those issues internally and through the federal rule making process. With the submission of RIN: 2900-AP66, the VA is proposing to amend its adjudication regulations relating to presumptive service connection for certain diseases associated with contaminants present in the base water supply at Camp Lejeune and finally provide some financial relief to these veterans. We ask that OMB approve this rule immediately and allow it to proceed to the public comment period.

While affected veterans are receiving health care, many have lost their homes and their ability to work and financially support themselves because of the disabilities caused by the illnesses they developed from toxic exposure. Many more are teetering on the brink of losing their homes and bankruptcy. This is not just a North Carolina problem; this is a national problem. One Camp Lejeune veteran said it well when he said, "It's great they are getting health care, too bad they are living in their Buick." The current process the VA has in place for evaluating disability claims from Camp Lejeune veterans is insufficient and mired in bureaucracy. This is leading to many disabled veterans, some terminally ill, being continually denied disability

compensation from the VA despite exhaustive scientific research showing a clear causal connection between their medical conditions and the exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune. The bureaucratic mistreatment of these veterans is unacceptable, and it cannot be allowed to continue.

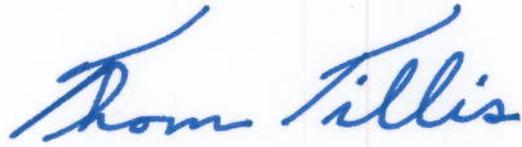
We are not of the opinion that scientific research on this issue is lacking or should give OMB pause in approving this rule. To the contrary, the research that has been conducted on the contaminated water at Camp Lejeune by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is exhaustive. The recent Public Health Assessment conducted by ATSDR shows clear causal connection between the contaminated water and the nine conditions that are under consideration in this rule for presumption of service connection.

Again, we urge OMB to immediately approve this proposed rule and allow it to proceed to the public comment period. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Richard Burr  
United States Senator



Thom Tillis  
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Robert McDonald, Secretary of Veterans Affairs