



VADM Norbert R. Ryan, Jr. USN (Ret)
President

June 9, 2009

The Honorable Bob Filner
Chairman, House Committee on Veterans Affairs
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Buyer
Rkg Mbr, House Vet. Affairs Comm.
333 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Filner and Ranking Member Buyer:

On behalf of our 380,000 members, I am writing to express MOAA's support for H.R.952, a bill that would clarify the definition of "combat with the enemy" for the purposes of making determinations of service-connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) injuries.

As the Committee knows, there has been an alarming increase in the number of service men and women returning from theatres of military operations with behavioral injuries, including PTSD. Unfortunately, the existing language of the statute -- "combat with the enemy" -- has been interpreted to mean that a servicemember must have documentation of a specific event associated with the onset of PTSD. Under combat exclusion rules, women veterans may be unable to meet the definition despite extremely hazardous duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. The reality is that military medical and personnel records often are bereft of event details. Moreover, recent independent studies have concluded that the incidence of PTSD increases with multiple deployments not as the result of a specific event.

MOAA is confident that competent military and VA medical professionals today are trained in the diagnosis of PTSD. We do not subscribe to the unproven assertion that malingerers can "get over" a thorough medical evaluation for the condition or other behavioral injuries.

H.R. 952 would clarify that for the purposes of determining service-connection for PTSD, decisions would be based on service in a theatre of combat operations or combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities, vice the current standard.

Addressing this issue in a fair and reasonable way is consistent with MOAA and the Military Coalition's goal of improving policies and procedures that will lead to "seamless transition" for our nation's warriors. The law should not be used in an arbitrary and narrow way to preclude service-connected compensation for PTSD for those who have taken the fight to terrorists for more than seven years.

MOAA supports H.R.952, the Combat PTSD Act, and recommends that the full Committee favorably report the bill when it is scheduled for mark-up this week.

Sincerely,