

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

July 24, 2003

The Honorable Hansford T. Johnson
Acting Secretary of the United States Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Mr. Secretary,

We, the Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, urge you to take appropriate and immediate action to compensate the thousands of American residents of the Island of Vieques, who have health and property claims filed with your office.

As you are well aware, the United States Navy has used Vieques for the past 62 years for training exercises. These exercises have included the dropping of bombs and live ordinances that are composed of many heavy metals and chemical compounds. There are many instances where tactical weapons have been used on the island that are highly toxic to human health, such as Napalm, Depleted Uranium, among others.

There have been many tests of local vegetation, animals, and people that show there is sufficient evidence that heavy metals used in these ordinances are now reaching dangerous levels in the local environment, the food chain, and most importantly, the people. These scientific studies are the work of modern science, well-qualified scientists from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and some of the most distinguished Universities in the United States.

Science has proven that continuous accumulation of these heavy metals in the body over a long period of time causes many serious medical conditions. The health problems afflicting these American citizens range from much higher cancer rates and higher hypertension rates to cirrhoses and diabetes. The uniqueness of Vieques and its poor economic conditions has forced its citizens to be heavily dependent on the contaminated local vegetation, fish, crustaceans, and meat products. The Navy's discontinued use of the island as a training facility, without the necessary clean up, will not stop the sickness and accumulation of these metals in the people of Vieques. American citizens will continue to get sick and will continue to die.

Citizens of Vieques have been left without choice or opportunity to protect themselves or their families. Many of them have defended freedom, justice, and dignity, and the value of human life around the world as members of our Armed Services. All citizens of Vieques have paid a great price through years of sustained bombing and the

great sickness that has followed. Our nation should now be respectful of their sacrifice and suffering by allowing them the opportunity to protect themselves and their families by compensating them for the health and property claims that are filed with your office through the existing administrative process.

We, as Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, demand a meeting with you as soon as schedules will allow, to discuss your plans on compensating these citizens for their legitimate health and property claims. We urge you to make this meeting happen quickly, as each day, the children and other residents of Vieques become sicker and suffer life threatening and altering diseases due to this serious contamination.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to call on us at your earliest convenience. We look forward to meeting with you to discuss this very important life and death situation in the very near future,

Sincerely,

Ciro D. Rodriguez J. E. Serrano Sen. V. Torres

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