

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 15, 2020

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jim Inhofe
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
205 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, Chairman Inhofe, and Ranking Member Reed:

In support of bipartisan efforts to ensure that America's Karshi-Khanabad (K2) veterans receive health care and benefits that are commensurate with their dedicated service, we respectfully urge you to retain Section 742 of H.R. 6395, the *William (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021*, as you negotiate the final conference agreement. This key provision requires the Secretary of Defense to conduct a study on toxic exposure experienced by American servicemembers deployed at the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base in Uzbekistan between 2001 and 2005.

The United States established Camp Stronghold Freedom at Karshi-Khanabad Air Base in Uzbekistan in 2001 in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. With K2 situated within 100 miles of the Afghan border, American servicemembers deployed at this former Soviet Army base between 2001 and 2005 provided critical operational and strategic support to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, including Operation Enduring Freedom. Recent reports indicate that these brave servicemembers were exposed to multiple toxic chemicals and radiological hazards during their K2 deployments - primarily stemming from maintenance and missile storage activities conducted at the base by its previous occupant, the Soviet Army.¹

¹ *Cancers Strike Veterans Who Deployed to Uzbek Base Where Black Goo Oozed, Ponds Glowed*, McClatchy (Dec. 19, 2019) (online at <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/national-security/article238510218.html>).

Declassified Department of Defense documents recently released by the Subcommittee on National Security have further underscored the exposure of American servicemembers to toxic and radioactive materials at K2. They include hazardous petrochemicals, volatile organic compounds, elevated levels of tetrachloroethylene, depleted uranium, and toxins from burn pit smoke. According to a declassified September 2004 health assessment by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, “up to 100%” of assigned units at the base were potentially exposed to radiation on a daily basis.²

We have received this mounting evidence of toxic exposure as America’s K2 veterans continue to report that they have been diagnosed with multiple forms of cancer and other deteriorating health conditions. According to one public 2015 study by the U.S. Army, K2 veterans are up to five times more likely develop a certain type of cancer – malignant neoplasms of lymphatic and hematopoietic tissue – than counterparts that deployed to South Korea. The same study found that more than 60 veterans who deployed to the base between 2001 and 2005 “had been diagnosed with cancer or died from the disease.”³ Over 400 servicemembers have self-reported cancer and other illnesses through a Facebook group organized by K2 veterans to discuss base contamination and health issues.⁴

Regrettably, K2 veterans are still encountering significant challenges in receiving treatment and benefits for their service-connected disabilities given that the Department of Veterans Affairs has not yet acknowledged a causal relationship between K2 deployment and a subsequent cancer diagnosis. Completion of the Department of Defense study mandated by Section 742 of the House-passed authorization bill would mark a significant step towards ensuring that America’s K2 veterans receive medical care and benefits that are reflective of their service and sacrifice on behalf of our nation. This important language is largely derived from the text of H.R. 5957, the *K2 Veterans Toxic Exposure Accountability Act of 2020*, introduced by Rep. Mark Green (R-TN) and Rep. Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA) and cosponsored by over 50 bipartisan Members of Congress.

We again strongly urge you to retain Section 742 of H.R. 6395 as you develop the final National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

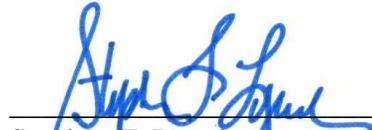
² *National Security Subcommittee Releases Newly Declassified Documents Revealing How Servicemembers Were Exposed to Multiple Toxic Hazards on Karshi-Khanabad Airbase*, Committee on Oversight and Reform (Jul. 9, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/news/press-releases/national-security-subcommittee-releases-newly-declassified-documents-revealing>).

³ *Cancers Strike Veterans Who Deployed to Uzbek Base Where Black Goo Oozed, Ponds Glowed*, McClatchy (Dec. 19, 2019) (online at <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/national-security/article238510218.html>).

⁴ *K2 Military Veterans, Widow Share Stories of Deadly Exposure with Lawmakers*, ABC News (Feb. 27, 2020) (online at <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/k2-military-veterans-widow-lawmakers-investigation-deadly-exposure/story?id=69263653>).



Mark E. Green, M.D.
Member of Congress (TN-07)



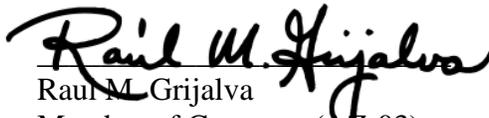
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress (MA-08)



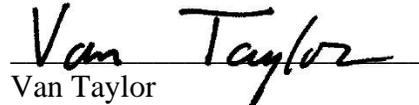
Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress (HI-02)



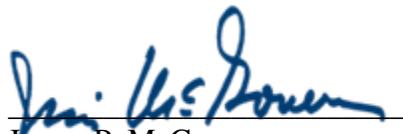
Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress (PA-01)



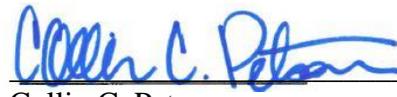
Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress (AZ-03)



Van Taylor
Member of Congress (TX-03)



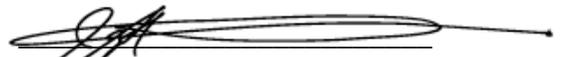
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress (MA-02)



Collin C. Peterson
Member of Congress (MN-07)



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress (DC-At-Large)



Jefferson Van Drew, D.M.D.
Member of Congress (NJ-02)



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress (CT-05)



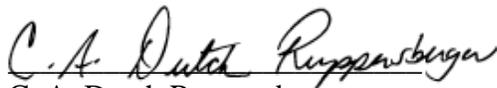
Sam Graves
Member of Congress (MO-06)


Kim Schrier
Member of Congress (WA-08)


Pete Olson
Member of Congress (TX-22)


Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress (WA-05)

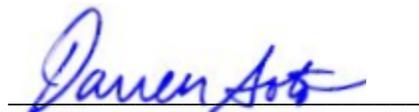

Steven Palazzo
Member of Congress (MS-04)


C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress (MD-02)


Jody Hice
Member of Congress (GA-10)


Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen
Member of Congress (AS-At-Large)


Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress (MD-08)


Darren Soto
Member of Congress (FL-09)

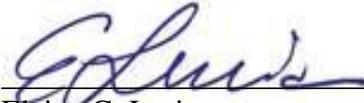

Harley Rouda
Member of Congress (CA-48)


Peter Welch
Member of Congress (VT-At-Large)


Steve King
Member of Congress (IA-04)



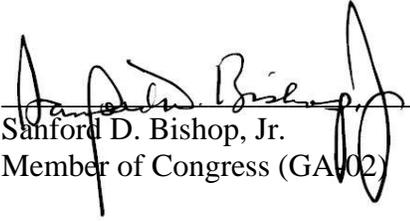
Angie Craig
Member of Congress (MN-02)



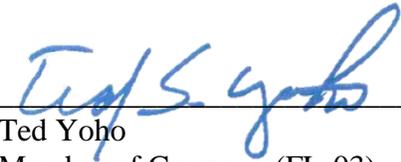
Elaine G. Luria
Member of Congress (VA-02)



Alcee Hastings
Member of Congress (FL-20)



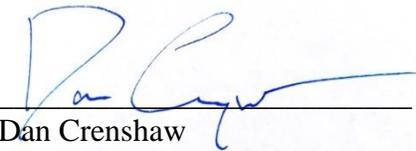
Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress (GA-02)



Ted Yoho
Member of Congress (FL-03)



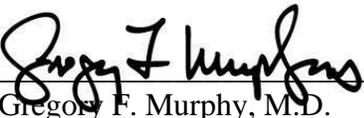
Dean Phillips
Member of Congress (MN-03)



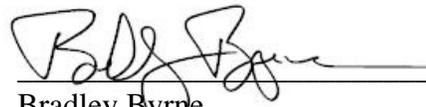
Dan Crenshaw
Member of Congress (TX-02)



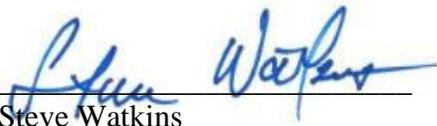
Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress (FL-12)



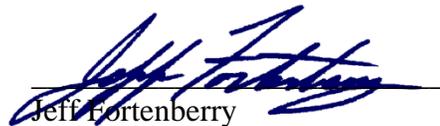
Gregory F. Murphy, M.D.
Member of Congress (NC-03)



Bradley Byrne
Member of Congress (AL-01)



Steve Watkins
Member of Congress (KS-02)



Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress (NE-01)



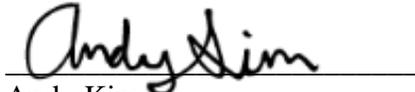
David Trone
Member of Congress (MD-06)



Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress (FL-01)



Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress (WA-01)



Andy Kim
Member of Congress (NJ-03)



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress (TX-15)



Louie Gohmert
Member of Congress (TX-01)



Jim Hagedorn
Member of Congress (MN-01)



Tim Ryan
Member of Congress (OH-13)



Brian Babin, D.D.S.
Member of Congress (TX-36)



Roger Williams
Member of Congress (TX-25)



Lance Gooden
Member of Congress (TX-05)



Greg Steube
Member of Congress (FL-17)



Brian Mast
Member of Congress (FL-18)



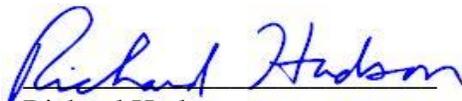
Bill Posey
Member of Congress (FL-08)



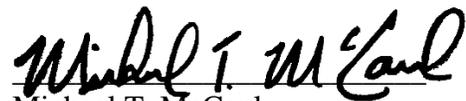
Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress (AZ-01)



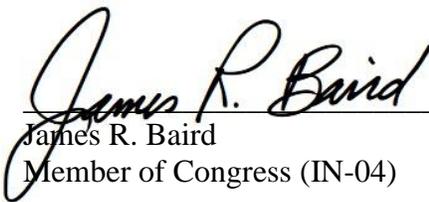
Pete Stauber
Member of Congress (MN-08)



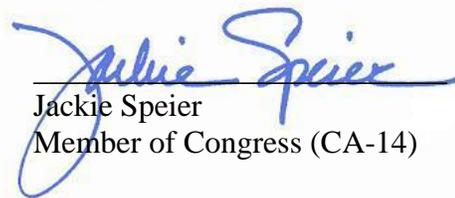
Richard Hudson
Member of Congress (NC-08)



Michael T. McCaul
Member of Congress (TX-10)



James R. Baird
Member of Congress (IN-04)



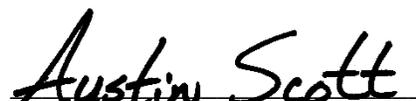
Jackie Speier
Member of Congress (CA-14)



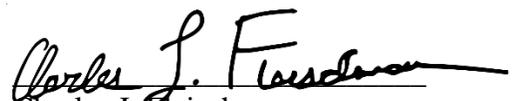
Glenn Grothman
Member of Congress (WI-06)



Ted Budd
Member of Congress (NC-13)



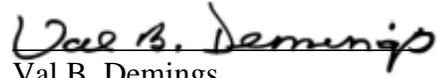
Austin Scott
Member of Congress (GA-08)



Charles J. Fleischmann
Member of Congress (TN-03)



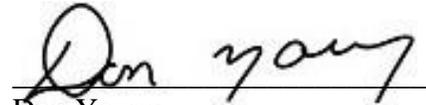
Ralph Norman
Member of Congress (SC-05)



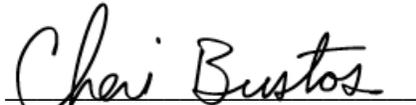
Val B. Demings
Member of Congress (FL-10)



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress (MN-04)



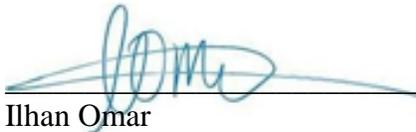
Don Young
Member of Congress (AK-At-Large)



Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress (IL-17)



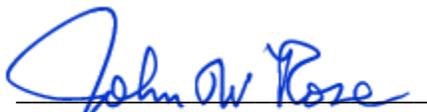
Will Hurd
Member of Congress (TX-23)



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress (MN-05)



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress (MN-06)



John W. Rose
Member of Congress (TN-06)



Tim Burchett
Member of Congress (TN-02)



David E. Price
Member of Congress (NC-04)



Deb Haaland
Member of Congress (NM-01)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Allred', written over a horizontal line.

Colin Allred
Member of Congress (TX-32)