Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 20, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House

Dear Mr. President:

As the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committees in the House and Senate, we are now engaged in an effort to advance legislation authorizing health care for veterans and family members who are ill as result of being exposed to contaminated drinking water at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune from approximately 1957 to 1987. To date, that effort has been slowed by the difficulty of identifying existing resources that could be better used on health care services for those affected by possibly the worst example of water contamination in our nation's history.

In your Administration's Fiscal Year 2013 budget request, it was revealed that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) overestimated health care resource requirements. VA has identified multiple areas within existing initiatives to reallocate appropriated funds based on the revised estimates. We ask that a portion of those funds, or other funds you can identify which can be repurposed, be reserved to provide care for sick Camp Lejeune veterans and family members.

In a recent letter responding to a similar call from Chairman Miller, VA Secretary Shinseki suggested that policy decisions affecting those exposed to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune were "premature," and that scientific studies expected to be delivered over the next two years would provide better guidance. Mr. President, we respectfully disagree. There is enough scientific evidence already that warrants giving the benefit of the doubt to those who need help now.

We will continue our efforts to advance legislation, but we can expedite health care services to sick veterans if we coordinated our efforts. VA has existing resources which could be reserved without derailing other initiatives; we will work the legislative process to complement what VA can do on its own authority. Only by working together, on a bipartisan basis, can we have the biggest impact on the lives of those who have already waited long enough.

We look forward to your response, and thank you for your commitment to our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

Patty Murray
Chairman

Jeff Miller
Chairman

Richard Burr
Ranking Member

Bob Filner
Ranking Member