

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2020

The Honorable Pete Visclosky
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
House Committee on Appropriations
H-405, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Visclosky and Ranking Member Calvert:

As your Subcommittee begins work on the Fiscal Year 2021 Defense Appropriations Bill, we respectfully request adequate funding for the Gulf War Illness Research Program (GWIRP) within the Department of Defense Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs. We also thank you for providing the program \$22 million in FY 2020.

By congressional design, the GWIRP is a unique medical research program narrowly focused on improving the health and lives of Veterans with Gulf War Illness. Reports by the National Academy of Sciences and government committees have shown that: 1) Gulf War Illness ("GWI"), likely caused by toxic exposures, affects up to one-third of the nearly 700,000 Veterans who served in the 1991 Gulf War; and 2) GWI's debilitating symptoms typically include "some combination of widespread pain, headache, persistent problems with memory and thinking, fatigue, breathing problems, stomach and intestinal symptoms, and skin abnormalities."¹

The GWIRP is narrowly focused on unraveling GWI's underlying pathobiology, improving its definition and diagnosis, and developing treatments. While two-thirds of GWIRP-funded studies are still in progress, the growing body of results published in peer-reviewed scientific journals demonstrates steady advances toward the GWIRP's goals. GWIRP-funded pilot studies shown as promising are now progressing to larger-scale clinical trials. These successes are the direct result of clear, treatment-focused congressional direction, stable appropriations, and effective management. Key recent GWIRP-funded results include:

- The first direct evidence of neuroinflammation in Veterans with GWI,² a treatable target.
- Significantly different gut microbiome patterns in GWI, including greater plasma levels of an inflammatory cytokine and associated with significantly more reported GW chemical weapons exposure and GWI symptoms.³

¹ National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine, "Gulf War and Health, Volume 8: Update of Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War," 2010; Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, "Gulf War Illness and the Health of Gulf War Veterans: Research Update and Recommendations, 2009-2013," 2014.

² Zeynab A, Albrecht DS, Bergan C, Akeju O, Clauw DJ, Conby L, Edwards RR, Kim M, Lee YC, Protsenko E, Napadow V, Sullivan K, Loggia ML. (February 2020). *In-vivo imaging of neuroinflammation in veterans with Gulf War illness*. Brain, Behavior, and Immunity. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2020.01.020>

³ Janulewicz, Patricia A.; Seth, Ratanesh K.; Carlson, Jeffrey M.; Ajama, Joy; Quinn, Emily; Heeren, Timothy; Klimas, Nancy; Lasley, Steven M.; Horner, Ronnie D.; Sullivan, Kimberly; Chatterjee, Saurabh. (2019). "The Gut-Microbiome in Gulf War Veterans: A Preliminary Report." Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 16, no. 19: 3751. <http://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16193751>. See also: "GWIRP-funded project expands exciting gut biome finding for Gulf War Illness"

- A 25 percent reduction in key GWI symptoms by treating GWI with KPAX002, a proprietary combination designed to support mitochondrial function.⁴

Recognizing the GWIRP's progress, the recommendations in the last Research Advisory Committee report remain instructive: "Congress should maintain its funding to support the effective treatment-oriented [GWIRP]."⁵ The discoveries through the GWIRP continue to represent encouraging steps toward achieving the treatment goals articulated by the NAS: "to speed the development of effective treatments, cures, and, it is hoped, preventions" for current and future U.S. forces at risk of similar exposures and outcomes. Indeed, the GWIRP has served as a model of how to conduct treatment-oriented research to address a challenging illness and is succeeding where earlier programs failed. Its two-tier peer-reviewed and highly competitive process ensures the independence and value of the results produced. Unlike the VA's research program, which only funds VA researchers, the GWIRP seeks out and funds the best research by any combination of government, academic, or private-sector researchers and research teams.

We respectfully request you provide the necessary resources in the FY21 Defense Appropriations Bill to continue this vital and effective program and to support its progress into more advanced, larger-scale clinical trials – a well-justified, added cost indicative of the GWIRP's steady progress. It remains critical to the program's success and accountability that the GWIRP is retained as a stand-alone program within the CDMRP and not be combined as a topic area within broader, less-targeted research programs.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, which is supported by the Association of the United States Navy, Blinded Veterans Association, DAV, Fleet Reserve Association, Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Military Order of the Purple Heart, National Vietnam & Gulf War Veterans Coalition, Non Commissioned Officers Association, Sergeant Sullivan Circle, TREA: The Enlisted Association, Veterans for Common Sense, Vietnam Veterans of America.

Sincerely,



GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress



JACK BERGMAN
Member of Congress

Member of Congress

⁴ Holodniy M, Kaiser JD. (November 2019). *Treatment for Gulf War Illness (GWI) with KPAX002 (methylphenidate hydrochloride + GWI nutrient formula) in subjects meeting the Kansas case definition: A prospective, open-label trial*. J. of Psych. Rsch., 118: 14-20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2019.08.003>. See also: "A Prospective Open-Label Clinical Trial of Methylphenidate plus a GWI-Specific Nutrient Formula in Patients with Gulf War Illness and Concentration Disturbances".

⁵ Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, "Gulf War Illness and the health of Gulf War Veterans: Research Update and Recommendations, 2009-2013," 2014.

FY 21 Defense-CDMRP-Gulf War Illness Research Program Request (Sablan-Bergman)
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