

June 3, 2021

The Honorable Jon Tester  
Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations  
United States Senate  
122 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations  
United States Senate  
115 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Shelby,

On behalf of the thousands of veterans and their interests represented by our organizations, we would like to offer our support for your efforts in securing the necessary resources to support the continued work by the treatment-focused Gulf War Illness Research Program (GWIRP), part of the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) within the Department of Defense (DoD). We thank you for your strong past support for the GWIRP, including providing the program \$22 million in Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21).

Successive federally funded reviews by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS)<sup>1</sup> and federal research committees<sup>2</sup> of published, peer-reviewed studies have consistently concluded that Gulf War Illness (GWI) affects approximately 25-32% of the veterans of the 1990-91 Gulf War.<sup>3</sup> “GWI is characterized by multiple, diverse symptoms that typically include chronic headache, widespread pain, cognitive difficulties, debilitating fatigue, gastrointestinal problems, respiratory symptoms, sleep problems, and other abnormalities that could not be explained by established medical diagnoses or standard laboratory tests.”<sup>3</sup> “Scientific research... supports and further substantiates... that Gulf War illness... resulted from hazardous exposures in the Gulf War theater.”<sup>2</sup> (p.1)

By congressional design, the GWIRP is a unique, treatment-focused research funding program. Its singular aim: “improved health and lives of veterans who have Gulf War Illness,”<sup>3</sup> by finding and funding the best Gulf War Illness research that: 1) “expeditiously identifies effective treatments and accelerates their clinical application,” 2) “improves definition and diagnosis,” and 3) “results in better understanding of pathobiology and symptoms of disease.”<sup>3</sup> Several CDMRP features set it apart from other federal research programs: “funding high impact, high risk and high gain projects that other agencies may not venture to fund”<sup>4</sup> on a highly competitive, extramural basis that includes researchers and multidisciplinary research teams from government agencies, academia, and/or the private sector; multiple tiers of peer review in funding decision-making; comprehensive inclusion of consumers (patients with the disease being studied).

In its landmark update on GWI, the NAS called for the federal government, “to speed the development of effective treatments, cures, and, it is hoped, preventions.”<sup>1</sup> The GWIRP’s mission remains focused on doing exactly that. While the COVID-19 pandemic adversely impacted much of the world, including research study progress, even still the GWIRP produced a number of key results in the last year. Among the highlights was co-hosting the first-ever *Gulf War Illness State of the Science Conference* in August 2020, intended to foster scientific progress. Held entirely online due to the pandemic, it included 67 presentations of GWIRP-

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<sup>1</sup> National Academy of Sciences, “*Gulf War and Health, Volume 8: Update of Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War*,” 2010.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> DoD CDMRP GWIRP webpage: <https://cdmrp.army.mil/GWIRP>

<sup>4</sup> DoD CDMRP webpage: <https://cdmrp.army.mil/aboutus>

funded GWI research, 42 presentations on GWI and other health conditions by VA, a Gulf War veteran panel, and hundreds of attendees who communicated and collaborated in real-time.<sup>5</sup>

Several of the GWIRP-funded researchers who completed their studies during the last year and had their results published in peer-reviewed journals focused importantly on the neuroinflammation and impaired bioenergetics issues understood to underlie GWI. Others found evidence for the role of other brain systems and the gut-brain axis. Each new finding further unraveled GWI's complexities, including identifying potential biomarkers and treatment targets. Several treatment pilot studies showed promise for larger-scale evaluation: a glutamate-reducing dietary intervention; nicotinamide riboside; and, three of nine botanical compounds tested including Curcumin, Resveratrol, and Pycnogenol. The GWIRP-funded Gulf War Illness Clinical Trials and Interventions Consortium (GWICTIC) is now recruiting for multiple interrelated clinical trials. Additionally, a large-scale, GWIRP-funded clinical trial of CoQ10 is now underway, aimed at confirming and validating the form of CoQ10 found in a GWIRP-funded pilot study to be efficacious in reducing several GWI symptoms.

Meanwhile, a GWIRP-funded longitudinal study of the Ft. Devens Cohort of Gulf War veterans further linked Gulf War toxic exposures to GWI symptoms and provided further evidence that GWI has worsened over time. Among 1990-91 Gulf War troops, seven percent were women; another GWIRP-funded study showed they continue to report rates of multiple symptoms at double the rate of their female non-deployed counterparts, further demonstrating that GWI remains a serious and unrelenting health issue.

The GWIRP remains the only federal program exclusively focused on developing treatments for this debilitating, chronic condition. Given its unique continuing value, we respectfully request your support in providing adequate Fiscal Year 2022 funding for the GWIRP to continue its vital and effective work and to support its progress into larger-scale clinical trials. It is also critical to the GWIRP's success and accountability that it remain a focused, stand-alone program within the CDMRP and not be combined within broader programs with multiple topic areas.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We deeply appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Blinded Veterans Association  
Burn Pits 360  
California Communities Against Toxics  
Cease Fire Campaign  
DAV  
Fleet Reserve Association  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America  
Jewish War Veterans of the USA  
Military Order of the Purple Heart  
Military-Veterans Advocacy  
National Veterans Legal Services Program  
National Vietnam & Gulf War Veterans  
Coalition

Paralyzed Veterans of America  
Reserve Organization of America (ROA)  
Sergeant Sullivan Circle  
Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)  
The Quinism Foundation  
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors  
United Soldiers and Sailors of America  
Veteran Warriors  
Veterans and Military Families for Progress  
Veterans for Common Sense  
Veterans of Foreign Wars  
VetsFirst  
Vietnam Veterans of America

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<sup>5</sup> CDMRP, "Joint VA/DoD Gulf War Illness State of the Science Conference Draws Hundreds of Researchers and Veterans: Online Event Coincides with 30-Year Anniversary of Operation Desert Shield": [https://cdmrp.army.mil/gwirp/research\\_highlights/20Goldman\\_highlight](https://cdmrp.army.mil/gwirp/research_highlights/20Goldman_highlight)