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March 29, 2013

Hon. Eric Shinseki, Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

It was a pleasure to meet with you last week. As I mentioned during our meeting, I remain concerned that many veterans in Maine who trained at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Gagetown may have been exposed to harmful substances that were sprayed there beginning in 1956.

There remains a considerable degree of dispute as to the potential harm that exposure to toxic residual particles used in defoliants at CFB Gagetown beginning in 1956 may have had on service members who trained there. A recent review by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the report, "*Environmental Site Assessment of CFB Gagetown*," which was commissioned on behalf of the Canadian Department of National Defense, concluded that the methodology used in the report was consistent with CDC guidelines; however, the CDC noted the limitations of its own conclusions, which relied on the assumptions and uncertainties included in the original report. Moreover, the CDC reiterated the following statement from the Canadian report:

The level of uncertainty resulting from ... activities, some of which occurred more than 50 years ago, coupled with the uncertainties inherent in standard forward-looking risk assessment, is very large. As a result, the expectations regarding the level of precision that this risk assessment exercise can produce should be limited.

For this reason, I request that you commission an independent study to examine potential health risks to veterans, including Maine National Guardsmen, who may have been exposed to harmful toxins while training at CFB Gagetown. Such a study should be carried out by an independent organization with expertise in the conduct of similar studies. I further request that the Department consult with Maine veterans who served at CFB Gagetown in carrying out this request.

In addition, I request that you establish a registry within the Department of Veterans Affairs to track individuals who may have been exposed to harmful substances at CFB Gagetown and who have previously or subsequently:

- 1) Applied for VA healthcare services;
- 2) Filed claims for compensation on the basis of any disability which may be associated with such service;

- 3) Had claims filed by survivors of such veterans for dependency and indemnity compensation; or,
- 4) Requested a health examination, including appropriate diagnostic tests, for inclusion in the Registry.

I respectfully request that your staff meet with my staff no later than April 29, 2013, to discuss these requests. Thank you for your prompt consideration of these concerns and for your service to America's veterans. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or have your staff contact Jared Golden of my staff at (202) 224-4395 or jared_golden@collins.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator