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HCR 27 Sponsor Testimony: Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

Chair Hoagland, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony on House Concurrent Resolution 27, which recognizes and honors victims of Agent Orange from the Vietnam War. Between 1961 and 1971, the United States Armed Forces utilized Agent Orange to destroy enemy crops and vegetation as part of its herbicidal warfare program, Operation Ranch Hand. In just ten years, more than 20 million gallons of Agent Orange were sprayed, exposing some 2.6 million American soldiers to harmful and toxic chemicals.

Upon returning home from duty, many of these service members developed severe and often fatal illnesses due to Agent Orange exposure. These diseases included leukemia, lymphoma, myeloma, heart disease, and various forms of respiratory cancer. In fact, every day, approximately 300 Vietnam Veterans who endured Agent Orange exposure die.

Now, that's not to say they all passed away from being exposed to Agent Orange, but for the overwhelming majority, it has greatly diminished their quality of life. And while their fallen comrades are memorialized on "the wall" in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC - - victims of Agent Orange have not been given the recognition and honor they rightfully deserve.

Throughout our nation's history, the men and women of our military have safeguarded the individual and collective freedoms we all cherish. And we are forever grateful to those who have given their lives in service of this great country. Unfortunately, for too long, victims of Agent Orange have been overlooked, and it's well past time we honor their sacrifice. So what this resolution does is ensure the heroism of every soldier who paid the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam is properly acknowledged.

Passing this resolution would make Ohio the third state, only behind Tennessee and Alabama, to officially honor victims of Agent Orange. I want to thank Lake County resident and Vietnam War veteran the late Arnold Stanko for bringing this matter to my attention and for being a terrific advocate for all veterans. Having said that, I am willing to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.