

# Tiger Team January Capitol Visit Summary

Tony Farrell, February 7, 2024

## Overview

I wholeheartedly feel that appealing to the offices of Congressional Representatives in person was critical to understanding the status of, and creating kinetic energy for, the Panama Canal Zone Veterans Act and for a related letter to the Secretary of the VA designed to accomplish the goals of the bill in a more efficient way.

I feel that calls and emails to the Disability subcommittee especially were entirely dismissed. The face-to-face meeting with Congressman Luttrell was, in my view, critical to moving our cause forward. I am unconvinced similar momentum could have been achieved without the direct personal involvement of Panama Canal Zone Veterans able to speak directly to the allegations of illnesses contracted from exposure to toxic substances sprayed on and near the bases, and the need for care and compensation from the VA for our sacrifices in the performance of duty.

I wish to thank profusely and especially Congressmen Morgan Luttrell and Joaquin Castro, and Congresswoman Maria Salazar and their offices for receiving us, hearing our concerns, and working with us to forge a solution for those who answered our nation's call on the isthmus of Panama.

## Sunday, January 28

Travel day. Met in the evening to review material and prepare for the week.

## Monday, January 29

Met with the Navy SEAL Foundation contingent, then started our day on the Hill with a meeting with the Office of Congresswoman Salazar to update them on specific goals for the visit, and to share a recorded interview with Frank, who could not attend our meetings in person. Visited the office of Congressman and Major General Trent Kelly (R-MS-01), Congressmen Marc Veasey (D-TX-33), Tony Gonzales (R-TX-23), Darren Soto (D-FL-09), Greg Casar (D-TX-35); Congresswoman Young Kim (D-CA-40).

In what was arguably the single most important event of the visit, we met with Congressman Morgan Luttrell (R-TX-08) on Monday evening and discussed H. R. 2447 and the draft letter to the Secretary of the VA as an alternate route to achieving the goals of the bill. In short, I believe Mr. Luttrell did not know about the bill, nor that it was in his subcommittee. The Disability subcommittee is now investigating how Panama Canal Zone Veterans were excluded from the PACT Act and is evaluating both the bill and the letter. I believe Mr. Luttrell seemed to believe the letter would be the more efficient means of addressing the issue, and that he stated his subcommittee is planning another markup session soon.

## Tuesday, January 30

If there's any senator for us to have a chance meeting with, we couldn't have done better than an Iraq War Veteran, Purple Heart recipient and former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs who was among the first handful of Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom: Senator Tammy Duckworth. I was extremely grateful to meet the Senator and her Chief of Staff -- we learned thereafter that there is some interest in the Senate of introducing a companion bill to H. R. 2447.

Later at the Longworth HOB, I called on the offices of Congresswomen Jasmine Crockett (D-TX-30), Beth Van Duyne (R-TX-24), Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE-At-Large), and Nancy Mace (R-SC-01). The afternoon saw a return to Rayburn and to Congresswoman Salazar's office for a staff-level meeting, and a visit to the office of Congressman Jamie Raskin (D-MD-08). We also had an impromptu meeting Congressman Joaquin Castro (D-TX-20) at the end of the day.

## Wednesday, January 31

I caught a ride back to Rayburn early and visited the office of Congresswoman Elise Stefanik (R-NY-21) and Congressmen Darrell Issa (R-CA-48), Don Bacon (R-NE-02), Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ-06), John R. Carter (R-TX-31), Pete Sessions (R-TX-17), Emanuel Cleaver, II (D-MO-05), Ron Estes (R-KS-4), Gabe Amo (D-RI-01), Bill Huizenga (R-MI-04), Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-MO-03), and Salud Carbajal (D-CA-24). I made certain to follow up with a staff member from each office that afternoon.

I had two meetings -- one with Congressman Raskin before joining another with Congressman Castro and the rest of the team.