

## SJC Releases Defense Department Documents On Water Contamination At Camp Lejeune

WASHINGTON (Thursday, July 19, 2012) – Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) on Thursday publicly released more than 8,000 Department of Defense documents relating to the historic drinking water contamination that occurred over several decades at Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base. The contamination of drinking water at the North Carolina military base was one of the worst environmental disasters to occur on a domestic military installation. The environmental disaster is believed to have affected the health and safety of more than 180,000 retired and active Marines and other citizens, who lived on or near the installation prior to 1987.

Chairman Leahy, a longtime advocate of government transparency and the public's right to know, obtained these important documents through his position as Judiciary Committee Chairman. A March 29 request for the documents made by a bipartisan group of Members of Congress, including Leahy, was denied in June. However, Chairman Leahy was successful in obtaining the documents after making a separate request to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta on behalf of the Senate Judiciary Committee. In keeping with Senator Leahy's longtime commitment to openness in government, these records are now being made available to the public. To protect the personal privacy of service members and other private information, personally identifiable information and information that would be subject to the Privacy Act has been redacted from the files released to the public.

"Today, thousands of active and retired Marines who lived on or near Camp Lejeune prior to 1987, and their family members, are extremely interested in learning more about what occurred, and why," said Leahy. "This information is also of great interest to many in Congress. That is why I have worked closely with many Senators and other Members of Congress, from both sides of the aisle, to seek more transparency about the Department of Defense's response to the water contamination that occurred at Camp Lejeune."

The Judiciary Committee obtained the documents on July 9. Electronic copies of the records are available online.

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Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),

Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,

On the Public Release of the Camp Lejeune Repository Documents

July 19, 2012

The "right to know" is a cornerstone of our Democracy. During my three decades in the Senate, I have urged Democratic and Republican administrations alike to be open and transparent to the American people.

That is why in March, I joined a bipartisan group of Members of Congress -- including Senators Grassley, Burr, Hagan, Bill Nelson, and Rubio -- in writing to Secretary of Defense Panetta to request the release of government records regarding the contamination of drinking water that occurred over several decades at

Camp Lejeune Marine Base. I commend the Senate for passing the Honoring Americans Veterans Act, H.R. 1622, which includes legislation that I cosponsored in the Senate to provide health services to Veterans and their family members who are suffering from the long-term health effects of exposure to contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune.

The drinking water contamination at Camp Lejeune was one of the worst environmental disasters in American history to occur at a domestic Department of Defense installation. Unfortunately, the Department of Defense initially refused to provide this important information to the Congress. But, I am pleased to report that after I pursued this matter further with Secretary Panetta, the Department finally provided more than 8,500 files about this issue to the Judiciary Committee on July 9th.

I commend Secretary Panetta for accommodating the Committee's requests for this information. But, I believe that much more transparency is needed.

In particular, I am deeply troubled by reports that the Department of Defense has been improperly using exemptions to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and other tactics to withhold key information from the public about this tragedy. The Judiciary Committee, which I chair, has a long and proud tradition of conducting oversight of the implementation of FOIA. In March, the Committee held a FOIA oversight hearing to examine these concerns and the Committee's review of this matter is ongoing.

I urge the Department of Defense to immediately disclose all of the information about this environmental disaster -- and its impact on the health and safety of our brave service members and their families -- to the American people. The Department of Defense must also comply with both the letter and spirit of the Freedom of Information Act in responding to requests from the public for this information.

Today, thousands of active and retired Marines who lived on or near Camp Lejeune prior to 1987, and their family members, are extremely interested in learning more about what occurred, and why. According to the Camp Lejeune Historic Drinking Water website maintained by the Marine Corps, more than 180,000 active and retired Marines have joined the Marine Corps's registry for service members who may have been exposed to contaminated water while living on or near the Marine base. In my own State of Vermont, 402 Vermonters have joined this registry and these citizens are looking to their Government to provide more information about this calamity.

This information is also of great interest to many in Congress. That is why I have worked closely with many Senators and other Members of Congress, from both sides of the aisle, to seek more transparency about the Department of Defense's response to the water contamination that occurred at Camp Lejeune. As I have said many times before, open government is neither a Democratic issue, nor a Republican issue -- it is truly an American value and virtue that we all must uphold.

It is in that bipartisan spirit that I announce that I will make all of the documents that the Department of Defense has provided to the Judiciary Committee about this matter available to the public. These documents can be accessed on the Judiciary Committee's website -- by going to [www.judiciary.senate.gov](http://www.judiciary.senate.gov). To protect the personal privacy of our service members and other private information, information that would be subject to the Privacy Act has been redacted from these files.

Earlier this month, our Nation celebrated the 46th anniversary of the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act. That law embodies the principle expressed by Justice Louis Brandeis, almost a century ago, that sunlight is the best disinfectant. Our government must honor this timeless principle -- even when disclosing the unvarnished truth may be difficult or embarrassing. The Marines and other Americans who have been touched by this environmental disaster deserve complete candor from their government. Our uniquely American tradition of a government that is open, accountable and accessible to its people

demands nothing less.

Again, I thank Senator Grassley, the Committee's distinguished ranking member, and Senators Burr, Hagan, Nelson, and Rubio for working closely with me on this important transparency issue.

I ask that a copy of my full remarks be placed in the Record.

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