

COMMITTEES:
BANKING AND FINANCIAL
INSTITUTIONS
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON GENERAL
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

November 9, 1999

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The Honorable Floyd Spence
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In a time when all branches of our military are having trouble recruiting and retaining quality personnel, the last thing our government should be doing is driving people away from military service. Unfortunately, the Defense Department's mandatory anthrax vaccination program is having just such an effect.

You have worked long and hard to improve recruitment and retention in our Armed Forces, yet there are widespread morale problems being created by this mandatory program which threaten your efforts. More than 200 men and women have chosen to resign from the service rather than take the vaccine. At least 220 have refused the vaccine and either have received disciplinary action or are awaiting disciplinary action. 25 Marines are reported to be awaiting courts-martial and dishonorable discharges for refusing to take the vaccine.

In my home state, several pilots in the 117th Air National Guard have reported they will leave the military if subjected to the mandatory vaccine. The 117th is held in high regard and has consistently set a standard of excellence throughout its history. Their patriotism and courage is without question. When this nation has faced a military crisis, it has turned to the Alabama Air Guard again and again for direct support and participation.

But these vaccinations, under a cloud of safety concerns, are forcing these patriots to choose between the safety and security of their families and their service to our nation. Given the lack of information we have about the vaccine and the reports of harmful side effects, it is not surprising that a growing number of our nation's military personnel are choosing to leave the service rather than take a potentially unsafe vaccine.

Exacerbating these concerns are that many Gulf War veterans suffer from unexplained illnesses that may have been caused by anthrax vaccinations they received during the war.

Even Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera has admitted the potential dangers of the anthrax vaccine. A memorandum he wrote in September 1998 and quoted by the *San Diego*

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Union-Tribune says the vaccine "involves unusually hazardous risks associated with the potential for adverse reactions in some recipients and the possibility that the desired immunological effect will not be obtained by all recipients."

Mr. Chairman, if the Secretary of the Army raises these concerns, how can we expect the most junior soldier, sailor, airman or Marine to accept the vaccine without question?

I know the Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel conducted a hearing on the anthrax vaccine program in September. Since then, two bills have been introduced that will address the concerns so many of our military personnel have about the vaccine. One, H.R. 2548, suspends the vaccine program until an independent study by the National Institutes of Health is conducted on both the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine. This bill also suspends the vaccine program until a separate study by the General Accounting Office is completed on the effect the program is having on moral, recruitment and retention. The second bill, H.R. 2543, makes the anthrax vaccination program voluntary, which is the policy of our own State Department for its personnel stationed overseas.

As a co-sponsor of both bills, I am respectfully requesting that you schedule time for the Armed Services Committee to hold hearings on both of these bipartisan bills with the intention of bringing one or both of them to the floor for a vote as soon as possible. I pledge to work with you toward this end in any way I can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Spencer Bachus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Spencer" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Bachus".

Spencer Bachus
Member of Congress

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