Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 18, 2015

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

A critical aspect of the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is to ensure that our nation's heroes have access to the treatments they need and deserve, while stemming the unacceptable tide of Veteran suicide. As such, we write to express our strong encouragement and support for the VA to complete the processes needed to broaden Veterans' access to Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) under their VA benefits. Although HBOT treatment is already widely accepted and used to treat a variety of conditions, we understand that currently the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and VA approve HBOT treatments for only 14 different modalities, three of which are neurological in nature, but not for treating Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

During HBOT treatment, a patient breathes pure oxygen at a greater than normal atmospheric pressure, thus allowing an increased amount of oxygen to circulate in the body. For centuries, it has been employed to successfully treat a wide array of conditions. Most recently, HBOT has been employed to treat brain injuries, where it is showing remarkable promise. Numerous private clinical studies positively demonstrate that HBOT provides significant improvement to the overwhelming majority of patients suffering from PTS and TBI who undergo treatment. The Israeli Defense Forces have recently begun using HBOT in treating TBI, PTS, and a variety of other brain conditions for its personnel, based in part on an Israeli study demonstrating the benefits of HBOT in treating TBI. Additionally, a study commissioned by the United States Army, although flawed in its initial interpretation, validates both the safety and efficacy of HBOT for the treatment of PTS and TBI. This study is currently scheduled for reexamination by the U.S. Navy, at the direction of Congress.

PTS and TBI are the signature injuries of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, the suicide rate among our nation's Veterans continues at an alarming rate. While lack of timely access to care is a key factor, overmedication is another significant contributor. Affording our Veterans effective treatment options that enable them to heal while safeguarding their overall health and well-being is a critical priority of the VA, and one of the most valuable aspects of HBOT is that it treats PTS and TBI *without the need for prescription medication*, enabling our Veterans to heal without the side effects that can cause serious long term health issues. Perhaps most importantly, employing a prescription free treatment where appropriate can directly address and improve the issue of overmedication of Veterans, which continues to play a direct role in the rate of suicides.

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Despite the enormous promise of HBOT, the VA and the FDA have yet to approve it for use in the treatment of brain injuries. Overcoming this delay, and increasing access to HBOT for our military members suffering from brain injuries and disorders has become such an important priority for Congress that it recently stated in the FY '15 National Defense Authorization Act that HBOT can and should be used *"to treat active duty members of the Armed Forces for TBI and PTS if the treatment is prescribed by a military doctor and the HBOT chamber is owned by the Department of Defense OR cleared for clinical use and is locally available."*

There are already numerous HBOT facilities throughout the country that are currently able to provide treatments for our Veterans, thus dramatically reducing associated expenses to the VA system since the infrastructure for treatment already exists, and continues to grow steadily. When the cost to taxpayers for each Veteran suffering from these signature wounds is evaluated, HBOT is an effective, safe, and cost-effective adjunct therapy for addressing these critical needs.

As you consider the merits of approving HBOT for our Veterans suffering from PTS and TBI, we are certain that the available data, including the studies and information referenced herein, will be of great value to you.

Increasing our Veterans' access to HBOT is just as vital as ensuring access for our active duty personnel. As such, we urge you to strongly consider approving HBOT therapy for PTS and TBI so that our Veterans who face these challenges are afforded every opportunity for the care and treatment that they have earned and deserve.

Sincerely,

JOYCE BEATTY
Member of Congress

BRADLEY BYRNE
Member of Congress

JOHN CONYERS
Member of Congress

RENEE ELLMERS
Member of Congress

MICHAEL M. HONDA
Member of Congress

DUNCAN HUNTER
Member of Congress

WALTER JONES
Member of Congress

DAN KILDEE
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ROBERT PITTENGER
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