

U.S. Sens. Baldwin, Moran: Introduce bipartisan bill to honor Southeast Asian Diasporas' contributions in Vietnam War

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Jerry Moran (R-KS), members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, introduced the bipartisan *Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act* to recognize the contributions of the many communities and Diasporas from Southeast Asia who supported and defended the United States Armed Forces during the war in Vietnam. The legislation also authorizes funding for the removal of landmines and unexploded ordnances (UXO) and victim support programs for those injured by landmines and other legacies of war.

“Wisconsinites and Americans are indebted to the Hmong-Americans and other Diasporas from Southeast Asia for their service and sacrifice to support our troops in the war in Vietnam,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “I am proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation to recognize and honor the efforts of these brave refugees and immigrants and work to do right by those communities who are still facing the consequences of the war. I’ve heard heart-wrenching stories from landmine survivors firsthand in Vietnam, and it is abundantly clear that the United States must take action to clear the unexploded ordnances and landmines.”

“The impact of war decades ago in southeast Asia is still being felt to this day,” **said Senator Moran.** “This bill recognizes the assistance provided to the American military by people of the region and helps remove the dangerous remnants of war, such as unexploded ordnances, left in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos that continue to prevent farmers from cultivating fields and parents from allowing their children to

play outside without fear.”

The legislation recognizes the Hmong, Cham, Cambodian, Lu-Mien, Khmu, Lao, Montagnard, and Vietnamese American communities who supported the U.S. during the war in Vietnam. Members of those communities saved thousands of lives by evacuating allied refugees and rescuing United States pilots shot down in enemy-controlled territory. Additionally, they gathered and provided intelligence to the U.S. Armed Forces about enemy troop positions, movement, strength and provided food, shelter, and support.

More than 40 years after the end of the Vietnam War, UXOs dropped over Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam during the Vietnam War continue to cause injuries and casualties. In Laos, much of the country's land remains littered with tens of millions of small UXOs that have led to the injury or death of more than 50,000 civilians since 1964. In Vietnam, an estimated 800,000 tons of UXOs are left over from the War and have caused more than 38,000 civilian deaths. Cambodia has one of the highest rates of landmine and UXO casualties in the world, with nearly 65,000 Cambodians losing their life or suffering an injury since 1979. This bill authorizes important funding for demining operations and the removal of these landmines and UXOs in Southeast Asia. The funding goes towards working with vetted demining organizations operating in the countries with the host government's approval.

Wisconsin has the third-highest Hmong population in the country, with the city of Wausau having the second-highest Hmong population per capita in the U.S., at nearly ten percent. Many of the families fled during the Vietnam War and were never able to return.

The legislation is supported by Legacies of War, HALO Trust, the Mine Action Group, The SEAD Project, LaoSD, Asian American Alliance, and LoasAngelas.

“Senator Baldwin's and Senator Moran's leadership in sponsoring the Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act is a major step forward in overcoming the legacies of America's 20th century military interventions in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. These conflicts ended 50 years ago but unexploded ordnance still mars the land and people of these countries, especially Laos, the most heavily bombed country per capita. This act provides much needed and continued support for cleanup and victims assistance,” **said His Excellency Ambassador Khamphan Anlavan, Lao PDR Ambassador to the United States.**

“As a child in Laos, I was taught to walk on well-worn paths to avoid unexploded bombs left over from the Secret War my parents survived. Today, I’m proud to lead Legacies of War’s efforts to support bomb clearance and survivor assistance so that children can live and play in safety. We are thankful to Senator Baldwin and Senator Moran’s leadership for sponsoring the Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act. This tragic legacy must end so that new ones may begin,” **said Sera Koulabdara, Executive Director, Legacies of War.**

“As a child of refugees, I’ve heard the numerous tragic stories of individuals losing their loved ones from unexploded bombs. Although these explosives were dropped or set up more than 40 years ago, it continues to affect our loved ones today, physically, spiritually, and mentally. On behalf of the Hmong American Center, Inc., we thank Senator Baldwin’s leadership for introducing the Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act. This legislation will recognize the contributions of Southeast Asians, continue to help save and improve lives, and ultimately provide closure to many for generations yet to come,” **said Yee Leng Xiong, Executive Director, Hmong American Center, Inc., of Wausau, WI.**

“As a child refugee of the Secret War, I know first hand how the War displaced my family and our entire community. I’m grateful that Senator Baldwin and other Community Leaders and organizations like Legacies of War are working to right those wrongs. I know my ancestors who fought in the War, and my living family members today who are Veterans of the War will appreciate this gesture,” **said Bee Lor, child refugee and community member of Wisconsin Rapids, WI.**

“With the Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act, the United States has one last opportunity of restoring trust and humility to a very tragic war rather than bury it in history. As a refugee child born during this Secret War/Vietnam War, I listened to stories that my mom and dad shared about building and defending a massive military base called Bouam Long. They described the fear they felt whenever they heard the hundreds and thousands of bombs that were dropped day and night on Bouam Long and surrounding areas. Bouam Long was the last stronghold in Laos before it fell to the Communist as the US left Southeast Asia. While the Vietnam War has been over for more than four decades for the US, its Southeast Asian Allies – individuals, families, and communities, continue to suffer from the remnants of that war. Specifically, unexploded land mines continue to incite suffering through great bodily injury and death when accidentally triggered by innocent children and adults, while meeting basic humanitarian needs remain at a critical level as many resources were destroyed during the war and never restored.

I applaud Senator Tammy Baldwin's leadership in introducing the Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act and look forward to the successful passage of this to allow survivors and their descendants the opportunity to truly start healing from this devastating war," **said Long Vue, Executive Director, Northeast Wisconsin Hmong Professionals, Inc. of Kaukauna, WI.**

"Nearly fifty years after the end of the Vietnam war, unexploded ordinance remains a menace to the people of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. But thanks to people like Senators Tammy Baldwin and Jerry Moran, this legacy of war is not forgotten. The Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act would significantly reduce the threat of harm from unexploded ordinance and demonstrate America's leadership in Southeast Asia," **said Jamie Franklin, Executive Director, Mines Advisory Group (MAG) America.**

"Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam contain some of the world's heaviest mine and unexploded ordinance contamination, impacting millions of people on a daily basis. Unfortunately, many of these deadly devices were left behind by the U.S. more than four decades ago. It's time for the U.S. to pass legislation addressing this tragic legacy for good, and we are grateful for the leadership of Senators Tammy Baldwin and Jerry Moran in introducing the Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act," **said Chris Whatley, Executive Director, HALO Trust (USA).**

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"As a Laotian American Hmong American and executive director of a community based nonprofit organization serving immigrants and refugees, I support the Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act as an important step to honor the contributions made by Southeast Asian communities, particularly in consideration of the trauma of military conflict in the 1960s and 1970s. The act could take important steps to authorize assistance to support these communities for assistance to address the remnants of war," **said Lee Po Cha,**

**Executive Director, Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization,
Portland, Oregon.**

The full text of the legislation can be found [here](#).

An online version of this release can be found [here](#).