



THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
MARK TAKANO, CHAIRMAN

Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2021 (Honoring our PACT Act)

BACKGROUND

When we sent our servicemembers into harm's way, we made a pact to care for them—and pay for that care—when they came home. For too long, Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have been slow to act citing high cost or lack of science. The result – **a disability benefit claims process that is cumbersome and places the burden to prove toxic exposure on veterans themselves.**

Every day more and more veterans speak out about exposure to environmental hazards and other toxic substances during military service such as:

- Contaminated water at military bases from [PFAS](#) and other toxins,
- Airborne hazards from [burn pits](#) and other sources while serving abroad, or
- Radiation from atomic testing and [cleanups](#).

Health impacts from these exposures vary from unexplained chronic multi-symptom illnesses to cancers, infertility, and respiratory conditions. **The Honoring our PACT Act is comprehensive legislation that will make good on our promise by addressing the full gamut of issues impacting toxic exposed veterans' access to earned benefits and care.** Veterans have already sacrificed so much—they shouldn't have to fight their country to make sure it honors this sacred pact.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

It's time Congress and the American people back up “thank you for your service” with action. Toxic-exposed veterans have held up their part of the pact—now it's our turn, regardless of the costs.

The Honoring our PACT Act will:

- Provide **Priority Group 6 health care** for certain toxic exposed veterans
- Provide **extension of combat eligibility** for health care from 5 to 10 years with a one-year open enrollment period for those veterans who missed their window.
- **Streamline VA's review process** for establishing toxic exposure presumptions
- **Concede exposure to airborne hazards/burn pits** based on locations & dates of service
- **Require medical exams/opinions** for certain veterans with toxic exposure disability claims
- **Add hypertension and Monoclonal Gammopathy of Undetermined Significance** to the list of presumptions for Agent Orange exposure
- **Establish a presumption of service connection for 23 respiratory illnesses and cancers related to burn pits/airborne hazards exposure**

- Create a **presumption of exposure to radiation** for veterans who participated in cleanup activities in Palomares, Spain, and Enewetak Atoll
- **Expand agent orange exposure to** veterans who served in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia
- Improve **data collection** between VA and the Department of Defense
- **Commission studies** related to incidents of cancer among veterans, health trends of Post 9/11 veterans and feasibility of providing healthcare to dependents of veterans
- Require VA to provide **standardized training** to improve toxic exposure disability claims adjudications
- Require VA to **conduct outreach** and provide resources to toxic exposed veterans

HONORING OUR PACT TO VETERANS

- In the past 20 years, Congress and our country made the choice to spend trillions on other priorities while sending servicemembers into harm's way at a cost of \$6.4 trillion. **We've trained and equipped them to fight to defend our country, and yet the high financial cost incurred during this time is only part of the true price of war.**
- When our country goes to war we don't nickel and dime the Department of Defense -- and **we shouldn't try to pinch pennies when it comes to covering the check for toxic-exposed veterans.**
- The cost estimates are in—now that we know the true cost of our promise, we cannot renege from our responsibility to toxic-exposed veterans. Opponents may cite potential increases in spending as a result of this legislation – but **the urgent need to uphold our promise to the men and women who have sacrificed for our country requires us to recognize this as the price tag for such service.**
- **No more can Congress cry for fiscal restraint when it comes to care and benefits for veterans -- It's time we honor our pact, prioritize veterans, and pay for the true cost of war.**