

The Comprehensive and Overdue Support for Troops (COST) of War Act / The Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) ACT, H.R. 3967



WHY IS THIS LEGISLATION NECESSARY?

Exposure to contaminants and other environmental hazards is a major health issue for post-9/11 veterans. Those exposed have developed cancers, autoimmune disorders, skin diseases, respiratory illnesses, and other conditions. It is estimated that 3.5 million service members and veterans have been exposed to burn pits. And it's not just burn pits causing these illnesses and injuries – some who have fallen ill have reported being exposed to chemicals found in fire-fighting fluids, depleted uranium shells, engine fumes, and more.

For those seeking treatment, the largest barrier to Department of Veterans Affairs health care is establishing service connection – an exceedingly difficult task when it comes to toxic exposure claims. Unfortunately, post-9/11 combat veterans with no service-connected disability lose eligibility for VA care five years after discharge; those who are already sick lose access to treatment, and those who are concerned about their exposures lose access to preventative care. Additionally, no permanent framework currently exists to require the establishment of presumptive service connection, even when the scientific evidence points to an association between toxic exposures and veterans' illnesses.

WHAT WILL THIS LEGISLATION DO?

In conjunction with WWP's work with coalition partners, Congress is taking meaningful action to address these issues, particularly in the form of two toxic exposure omnibus bills: the Senate's COST of War Act, introduced by Senator Jon Tester, and the House's Honoring our PACT Act, introduced by Representative Mark Takano.

The intent of the COST of War Act and the Honoring our PACT Act is to recognize and establish the federal government's responsibility to provide health care and disability compensation to veterans fighting the effects of toxic exposure connected to their military service.

The COST of War Act and the Honoring Our PACT Act would:

- Grant VA health care enrollment eligibility to any veteran who suffered toxic exposures while in service, regardless of their service-connected disability claim status;
- Create a list of presumptive disabilities for veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances;
- Concede exposure to burn pits and other airborne hazards for veterans who served in areas where they were known to be used;
- Ensure VA adopts a framework to establish new presumptive disabilities for all exposures in a timely manner based on scientific data;
- Develop a training module to ensure VA providers and benefits' personnel are able to properly identify, treat, and assess the impact of illnesses related to toxic exposures; and
- Require a toxic exposure questionnaire at the beginning of every VA primary care appointment.

THIS LEGISLATION IS GROUNDBREAKING

Historically, Congress has dealt with military toxic exposures with separate legislation that addresses each one conflict by conflict, exposure by exposure. WWP supports the passage of legislation that will provide permanent access to health care and improve the disability benefits system for all veterans who suffered military toxic exposures, regardless of where or when they served.

While the legislation does not and cannot address all toxic exposure concerns for future eras, it does finally ensure the next generation of veterans who are exposed are not once again starting from square one like each generation before them.

WWP urges all Members of Congress to support the COST of War Act and H.R. 3967, the Honoring our PACT Act, to improve health care and benefits for all veterans who suffered toxic exposures, now and in the future.