

Historic Burn Pit Legislation for Post-9/11 Veterans Introduced by Two Post-9/11 Veterans

NEW YORK, NY (May 1, 2018) – Today, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) announced that U.S. Representatives Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) and Brian Mast (R-Florida), both Iraq or Afghanistan combat veterans themselves, have introduced historic new legislation focused on the widespread exposures of servicemembers to [burn pits](#) and [airborne toxins](#) during post-9/11 deployments. These toxic exposures could potentially impact millions, have deeply concerned IAVA members nationwide and could be the Agent Orange of our generation.

The VA estimates 3.5 million veterans are eligible to register in the [VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#), which tracks exposures to airborne toxins. **An enormous 80% of [IAVA members report](#) that they were exposed during their deployments and 63% report associated symptoms.**

Veterans have expressed deep concerns that these exposures could potentially result in cancer, respiratory issues and birth defects. A definitive scientific link between exposure and specific illnesses has not yet been made, and the VA's Burn Pit Registry is not well-known and is underutilized. The result is that the data on these exposures is not being collected at the levels desired to inform next steps. Until this point, the Department of Defense (DoD) has not taken formal accountability of toxic exposures by theater locations for deployed servicemembers.

Specifically, the *Burn Pits Accountability Act* directs the DoD to include in periodic health assessments and during military separations an evaluation of whether a servicemember has been exposed to open burn pits or toxic airborne chemicals. If they report being exposed, they will be enrolled in the Burn Pit Registry unless they opt out.

"Burn pits are one of the most critical issues facing our generation of veterans. IAVA members nationwide are deeply concerned and incredibly focused on this issue. Burn pits could impact millions and be our generation's Agent Orange. Increasing accountability at the DoD for servicemembers' toxic exposures is long overdue. The introduction of this historic legislation is welcomed news for our community of over 3 million veterans that have fought in our nation's wars since 9/11," **said IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff** . "We applaud the strong leadership of our fellow Post-9/11 veterans in Congress. They have stepped forward in a united, bipartisan effort to put veterans first. Representative Gabbard and Representative Mast have both lived our wars themselves—and are the perfect leaders to drive forward this change. Just as they did on the battlefields of Iraq and

Afghanistan, Reps. Gabbard and Mast are now leading for their fellow troops in Congress. Their unity, bipartisanship and patriotism are an inspiration and an example for all members of Congress—and all Americans. IAVA members nationwide are standing by and look forward to working tirelessly alongside them to get this done.”

Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, Founder and Co-Chair of the Congressional Post 9/11 Veterans Caucus, said : “Whether serving in Iraq or Afghanistan, our post-9/11 veterans were exposed to open-air burn pits, often for many hours a day. Some veterans who I deployed with are now falling sick with cancer and other illnesses. But, there is no research and data about exposure to burn pits and other toxic chemicals, and how they have impacted the health and well-being of our servicemembers and their families. Our bipartisan legislation will evaluate exposure to burn pits and other hazardous airborne chemicals to ensure our servicemembers and veterans receive the treatment and services they earned and deserve.”

Congressman Brian Mast said : “When I was serving in Afghanistan, trash and human waste were often burned in open air pits. I think it’s quickly becoming clear that these burn pits are emerging as the Agent Orange of my generation. Service members that were exposed in Iraq and Afghanistan are seeing terrible health effects at a very young age. These men and women risked their lives for our country, and this bipartisan legislation will go a long way toward getting them the care they have earned.”

Support for injuries from burn pits and other toxic exposures is just [one](#) of six policy priorities IAVA is advocating for on behalf of the Post-9/11 generation of veterans, as well as veterans of all eras in our [2018 Big 6 Advocacy Priorities](#) outlined in the [IAVA Policy Agenda](#):

- 1) Sustain the campaign to combat suicide among troops and veterans
- 2) Sustain the campaign to recognize and improve services for women veterans
- 3) Defend veteran and military education benefits
- 4) Defend and reform government support for today’s veterans
- 5) Initiate support for injuries from burn pits and other toxic exposures
- 6) Initiate empowerment of veterans who want to utilize cannabis

Article: [Military Burn Pits: The New Agent Orange?](#)