

# [Reps and Veterans Mast and Gabbard Unite with IAVA For Burn Pit Action](#)

**WASHINGTON, DC (May 15, 2018)** – Thursday, May 17 at 10 AM ET, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the leading post-9/11 veterans empowerment organization, will unite with Representatives Brian Mast (R-FL) and Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) for a historic press conference focused on burn pits—which could be the Agent Orange of our generation. Mast and Gabbard have served in Afghanistan and Iraq themselves—and have united across party lines to put country and their fellow veterans above any political differences. In these divided times, it’s an important and inspiring demonstration of leadership and unity. IAVA will also be joined by over a dozen supporting veterans and leading veteran service organizations.

Toxic exposures (from burn pits and other sources on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan) could potentially impact millions of veterans and their families, 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 stunning 80% of [IAVA members report](#) that they were exposed to toxins during their combat deployments and 63% report associated symptoms already.**

IAVA, Mast, Gabbard and their allies will introduce the groundbreaking *Burn Pits Accountability Act* ([H.R. 5671](#)). This bipartisan legislation would study servicemembers’ exposure to open burn pits and toxic airborne chemicals to begin the process of understanding, assessing, and treating these service-related ailments.

“IAVA members have sounded the alarm on a potentially devastating health care tidal wave. We also did our research, laid out a plan, built awareness at Storm the Hill this spring, helped draft legislation, and worked with two outstanding allies from both sides of the aisle to be our champions in Congress. We’ve called for fire—and rounds are now inbound. We’ve now got historic legislation to begin to tackle this silent enemy that could impact millions of us for decades to come. This week, our fellow Post-9/11 veterans, Representatives Gabbard and Mast, Army Iraq and Afghanistan veterans respectively, will stand with IAVA to introduce a bill to finally appropriately focus on burn pits. It’s an important first salvo in what could be a fight to last a generation. It directs the Department of Defense to include in health assessments and during 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 immediately enrolled in the Burn Pit Registry,” said **IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff**.

“This is a huge moment—because we need a foundation of strong research to prepare for what could be decades of health impacts. A definitive link between exposure and specific illnesses has not been established. And the

VA's Burn Pit Registry is not well-known and underutilized. That means data on exposures is not being collected at levels needed to inform appropriate national action. And DoD has never taken real accountability of toxic exposures by theater location for deployed servicemembers. This bill takes a critical step toward increased research and awareness, and eventually, if need be, treatment for affected veterans. As we approach Memorial Day later this month, this is the time for action on an urgent and truly non-partisan issue," added **IAVA Chief Policy Officer, Melissa Bryant**.

"I served more than five years in Iraq and Afghanistan," said **retired General and IAVA Board Member, David H. Petraeus**, whose service included serving as Commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) during the Surge of 2007-2008 and as Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) during the Surge in Afghanistan of 2010-2011. "I was concerned about the effects of burn pits on our soldiers and civilians then (and raised those concerns at the time), and I continue to be concerned about the effects on those who spent periods in either country exposed to the smoke from waste pits and other sources."

"Veterans are currently experiencing illnesses that likely are related to exposure to toxins in the war zones," **General Petraeus** observes, "and swift action is needed to understand the impact on health of exposure to smoke from burn pits and other sources. That is why I support the bipartisan Burn Pits Accountability Act. It will mandate the data collection needed to help understand the effects of exposure to toxins on our men and women who were in the war zones and contribute to the development of appropriate medical treatments for them. I hope all members of Congress will stand with IAVA and our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and support this important bill."

**Additional details:** IAVA Press Conference on Burn Pit Accountability Act, featuring Representative [Tulsi Gabbard](#) (D-HI), Representative [Brian Mast](#) (R-FL), CEO and Founder, [Paul Rieckhoff](#), IAVA Chief Policy Officer, [Melissa Bryant](#), and over a dozen supporting Veterans and Veteran Service Organizations including the Fleet Reserve Association, Military Officers Association of America, US Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Non Commissioned Officers Association, Service Women's Action Network, US Army Warrant Officer Association, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the US, The Retired Enlisted Association, Chief Warrant Officer Association- US Coast Guard, Air Force Sergeants Association, National Military Family Association, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Wounded Warrior Project, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, AMSUS, American Veterans (AMVETS), Reserve Officers Association of the United States, Air Force Women Officers Associated, Disabled American Veterans, Association of the United States Navy, and Burn Pits 360.

**House Triangle, U.S. Capitol, 10AM ET, Thursday, May 17**

**Rain location:** Rayburn House Office Building, Room Number 2216

**Hashtags:** #BurnPits #IAVA

Support for injuries from burn pits and other toxic exposures is [one](#) of six 2018 Advocacy priorities IAVA is focused on for the Post-9/11 generation of veterans, and veterans of all eras. More details are available in our [2018 Big 6 Advocacy Priorities](#) and in the [IAVA Policy Agenda](#):

- 1) Combat suicide among troops and veterans
- 2) Recognize and improve services for women veterans
- 3) Defend veteran and military education benefits
- 4) Defend and reform government support for veterans
- 5) Support injuries from burn pits and toxic exposures
- 6) Empower veterans who want to utilize cannabis