



Statement of Travis Horr
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of
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before a joint hearing of the
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees

March 29, 2022

Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, and distinguished members of the Committee, on behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and our more than 425,000 members, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the important hearing today.

According to IAVA's latest member survey, over 80% of IAVA members were exposed to burn pits during their deployments and a shocking 90% of those exposed believe they already have or may have symptoms. IAVA and our allies within the VSO community have spent years educating Congress, national leaders, and the public on the enormous scope of these injuries faced by our community.

Year after year, the concern grows surrounding the health impacts of burn pits and other toxic exposures in recent conflicts. Burn pits were a common way to get rid of waste at military sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. The effect of toxic exposure is not just the chemicals in the smoke, but the particulate matter, dust, ashes and other pollutants these men and women breathed in. Approximately 3.5 million veterans were exposed to burn pits and other airborne hazards. Yet VA continues to deny approximately 70% of burn pit-related claims. Much-needed legislation would finally take the burden of proof off the veteran by creating a presumption of service connection for a list of illnesses and diseases, including cancer, as well as allowing veterans to receive health care from VA.

While VA has made many strides forward in the past year, creating presumptives of 12 illnesses due to toxic exposure, it is simply not enough. Veterans are looking towards Congress for bold action and leadership. The time to pass critical, comprehensive legislation to ensure that veterans have the healthcare, benefits, and a framework for how presumptive illnesses are handled, is now.

It is for these reasons that IAVA submits a statement in support of the *Honoring Our PACT Act* today. This critical piece of legislation is a culmination of years of work by Members on this



Committee, those within the VSO community, and more, to finally address veterans that have suffered from their exposures.

We understand that there have been a number of bills introduced in the Senate to address a range of toxic exposure issues, yet the *PACT Act* is the legislation that will provide the most comprehensive solution. Veterans that have been exposed and are now sick can not wait any longer for the healthcare and benefits that they have earned through their service. Additionally, the *PACT Act* includes an important framework to address military toxic exposures into the future. We must ensure that the 117th Congress is when veterans finally receive comprehensive legislation that includes healthcare, benefits, and a framework to address one of the signature injuries of the post-9/11 wars.

IAVA and other VSOs will continue to advocate strongly for the passage of this legislation. We have worked tirelessly to address concerns from Members of Congress and VA to ensure that this legislation can not only pass into law, but also do so without overwhelming VA resources.

On behalf of the 3.5 million veterans who were exposed to burn pits and other airborne hazards. And on behalf of the veterans behind the nearly 70% of burn pit related claims that were denied by the VA, I implore you to pass the comprehensive toxic exposure legislation supported by nearly every veterans group in the country and finally keep America's promise to take care of those who fought to defend us. Congress must pass comprehensive legislation without delay.

Members of both Committees, thank you again for the opportunity to share IAVA's views on these issues today. I look forward to working with the Committee in the future.