

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Votes to deliver earned health care and benefits for toxic-exposed veterans

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin voted for bipartisan legislation that will give all generations of toxic-exposed veterans their earned health care and benefits under the Veterans Affairs (VA) for the first time in the nation's history. The *Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics of 2022* —or PACT Act —passed the Senate 84-14 and will expand VA health care eligibility to post-9/11 combat veterans, many of whom were exposed to open-air burn pits that were used throughout the 1990s and the post-9/11 wars to burn garbage, jet fuel, and other materials. Veterans diagnosed with cancer, respiratory issues, and lung disease at young ages have blamed exposure to the toxic fumes from these pits, but the Department of Veterans Affairs contended for years that there wasn't sufficient evidence to support their claims. With passage of the PACT Act, more than 3.5 million toxic-exposed veterans will now be eligible for expanded VA benefits.

“We have a commitment to do right by the troops who bravely defended our freedom, and that includes ensuring they all are able to get the health care and benefits they earned,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “We know that our veterans who were exposed to burn pits and other toxins while serving are at risk for very serious health outcomes, including cancer, and it was simply wrong for the VA to deny them health care and disability benefits. The PACT Act helps fulfill our commitment to those who served and ensures they have access to the care and benefits they deserve.”

[Senator Baldwin previously introduced the *K2 Veterans Care Act*](#) to cover veterans who served at Karshi-Khanabad Air Base (K2) in Uzbekistan and who have since

been diagnosed with toxic exposure-related illnesses and diseases. As many as 15,000 U.S. servicemembers deployed to K2 Air Base to support military operations into northern Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The PACT Act includes expanded VA health care eligibility for K2 veterans exposed to multiple cancer-causing toxic chemicals and radiological hazards during their deployments.

The bipartisan legislation was led by Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Jerry Moran (R-KS), Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. The legislation is named after Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson who was deployed to Kosovo and Iraq with the Ohio National Guard and later died in 2020 from toxic exposure as a result of his military service. Among the legislation's many priorities, the *Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act* of 2022 will:

- Expand VA health care eligibility to Post-9/11 combat veterans, which includes more than 3.5 million toxic-exposed veterans;
- Create a framework for the establishment of future presumptions of service connection related to toxic exposure;
- Add 23 burn pit and toxic exposure-related conditions to VA's list of service presumptions, including hypertension;
- Expand presumptions related to Agent Orange exposure;
 - Includes Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, American Samoa, and Johnston Atoll as locations for Agent Orange exposure;
- Strengthen federal research on toxic exposure;
- Improve VA's resources and training for toxic-exposed veterans; and
- Set VA and veterans up for success by investing in:
 - VA claims processing;
 - VA's workforce;
 - VA health care facilities.

The legislation is endorsed by Air Force Sergeants Association, AMVETS, Association of Military Surgeons of the United States, Balanced Veterans Network, Blinded Veterans Association, Blue Star Families, Burn Pits 360, California Communities Against Toxics, Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS, Disabled American Veterans, Dixon Center for Military and Veterans Services, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, FealGood Foundation, Fleet Reserve Association, Gold Star Wives of America, Inc, GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer, Green Beret Foundation, Grunt Style Foundation, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Jewish War Veterans, K9s For Warriors, Marine Corps Reserve Association,

Military Chaplains Association, Minority Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, Military-Veterans Advocacy, Military Veterans of America, Modern Military Association of America, National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, National Military Family Association, National Veterans Legal Services Program, Non Commissioned Officers Association, Paralyzed Veterans of America, ROA, Service Women's Action Network, Special Operations Association of America, Student Veterans of America, Task Force Dagger Special Operations Foundation, The American Legion, The Independence Fund, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, TREA, United Soldiers and Sailors of America, US Army Warrant Officers Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Veterans Prostate Cancer, Veteran Warriors, Vietnam Veterans of America, We the Veterans, Wounded Warrior Project, Your Next Stage.