

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Celebrates one-year anniversary of delivering earned health care and benefits for toxic-exposed veterans

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – One year ago, today, the *Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics of 2022* (PACT Act), which U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin supported, was signed into law, finally delivering all generations of toxic-exposed veterans their earned health care and benefits under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the first time in our nation's history. As of August 4, more than four million veterans have been screened for toxic exposure and nearly 350,000 Americans have been approved for PACT Act benefits, according to [VA](#). In [Wisconsin](#), nearly 15,000 veterans have filed PACT Act claims, with more than 6,600 veterans already having been approved for expanded benefits.

“Our veterans and their families have made immense sacrifices, and we have a commitment to do right by those who served our country. But sadly, for too long, we have come up short on our end of the bargain,” **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. I am so proud to have helped right this wrong and fulfill our commitment to those who served to ensure they have access to the care and benefits they earned.”

The PACT Act expanded 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 the passage of the PACT Act, more than 3.5 million toxic-exposed veterans are now eligible for expanded VA benefits.

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 included expanded VA health care eligibility for K2 veterans exposed to multiple cancer-causing toxic chemicals and radiological hazards during their service.

Earlier this year, Senator Baldwin traveled around Wisconsin on her "[Delivering for Our Veterans Tour](#)," meeting with veterans and advocates in New Richmond, Wausau, Green Bay, and Racine to discuss the need to pass the Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act and highlight new benefits for veterans harmed by toxic exposure from the PACT Act. Click [here](#) to hear from Larry Hill, a Vietnam veteran from Sparta who is now eligible for VA benefits under the PACT Act.

An online version of this release is available [here](#).