

UPDATE

Vietnam Veterans of America, February 17, 2022

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

BREAKING: Tester, Moran Bill to Expand VA Health Care for Post-9/11 Veterans Unanimously Clears Senate

Committee leaders' bipartisan Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act one step closer to becoming law

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

(U.S. Senate) – The U.S. Senate today unanimously passed [bipartisan legislation](#) introduced by Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), bringing it one step closer to law. The Senators' *Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act* would expand Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care for Post-9/11 combat veterans—including those suffering from conditions related to toxic exposure.

The legislation now moves to the House of Representatives for consideration.

“Unanimous passage of our *Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act* sends a clear message to toxic-exposed veterans across the country that we are committed to moving the needle on addressing toxic exposures in a comprehensive and bipartisan way,” said Chairman Tester. **“Our bill is a necessary step in connecting an entire generation of veterans with the VA care they need and cannot wait for any longer. This kind of swift action is a testament to what can be accomplished when we all row in the same direction, and I encourage my House colleagues to join us in getting this bill across the finish line to quickly deliver relief where it’s most needed.”**

“Supporting our veterans has a way of bringing us together, and I appreciate my Senate colleagues understanding the urgency of this bill and working to quickly pass it

by unanimous consent,” said Ranking Member Moran. **“Addressing the needs of veterans exposed to burn pits cannot wait, and I urge my colleagues in the House to follow suit, pass this important legislation and bring us one step closer to fulfilling our duty to Post-9/11 veterans.”**

Approximately 3.5 million Post-9/11 combat veterans may have experienced some level of exposure to burn pits during their service, and nearly one-third of those veterans are currently unable to access VA care. Among its many provisions, the Senators’ bipartisan *Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act* would extend the period of health care eligibility for combat veterans who served after September 11, 2001 from five years to ten years following discharge—enrolling a new wave of previously-ineligible veterans into the VA system. This bill also includes critical measures to improve training on toxic exposures for VA employees, mandate clinical toxic exposure screenings, and bolster federal research on the effects of toxic exposures.

The Senators’ health care expansion effort has strong backing from the nation’s leading Veterans Service Organizations:

“The VFW is thankful for the attention Senators Tester and Moran have brought to veterans by introducing this proposal which will expand health coverage for certain veterans from five years to ten years of eligibility after they leave the service,” **said Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Legislative Director Pat Murray.** “We appreciate and understand this bill is the first step in providing care and benefits for certain veterans and we implore the Senate to quickly introduce and pass steps two, three, and more.”

“One of the pressing needs of veterans who were exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances during service is guaranteed access to VA health care,” **said Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) Vice President for Government and Community Relations Jose Ramos.** “Current law provides recently discharged combat veterans with 5 years of guaranteed care, but exposure-related illnesses often surface well past this short window of time. By extending the eligibility window to 10 years with a 1-year open enrollment period, the *Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act* will allow more veterans to access care in the short term. While we thank Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Moran for taking a first step to address this issue, we emphasize that there is still more work to be done. No veteran who suffered burn pit exposure should ever be turned away from VA care, regardless of whether they served 10 years ago, 20 years ago, or longer. This is why we continue to support the *COST of War Act*, which would guarantee permanent access to care for exposed veterans, regardless of when they were discharged. We look forward to working with the Committee to pass the *COST of War Act*—a long-term health care solution—before the end of the 117th Congress.”

“MOAA supports the *Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act* and the expanded health care access, medical screenings, research, and training this bill offers,” **said Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) President and CEO Lieutenant General Dana T.**

Atkins, USAF (Ret). “Our burn pit exposed veterans have been waiting far too long to get their health care needs met. We applaud Senators Tester and Moran for working together on this legislation and urge Congress to swiftly pass this bill.”

“The American Legion is proud to support the *Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act* which eases the burden on veterans navigating the claims filing process by giving all post-9/11 veterans, in any theater of combat operations after November 1998, access to VA healthcare by granting Priority Group 6 eligibility,” **said The American Legion National Commander Paul E. Dillard.** “Although VA is working to improve the presumptive process, unfortunately time is running out for some. On behalf of the 1.8 million dues paying members of The American Legion, we thank Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Moran for their continued leadership on this issue.”

Today’s passage follows the Senators’ bipartisan call to action in an published last week.

As leaders of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Tester and Moran [have been dedicated to identifying a path forward](#) for outstanding toxic exposure issues, and remain committed to providing timely care and benefits to all generations of toxic-exposed veterans. The [Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act](#) is the first of a three-step approach to expand access to health care for toxic-exposed veterans, establish a new process through which VA will determine future presumptive conditions, and provide overdue benefits to thousands of toxic-exposed veterans who have been long-ignored or forgotten.

Last Congress, the Senators also [successfully championed](#) the [Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act](#), known as the *Hannon Act*, a groundbreaking law to widen and improve veterans’ access to lifesaving VA mental health care and services. The *Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act* would provide the biggest expansion in mental health care for Post-9/11 veterans since the signing of the *Hannon Act*.