

# Vietnam Veterans of America Wisconsin State Council

Saturday, June 25, 2022

VVA WSC Second Quarterly Meeting  
Camp Victory, Inc.  
Greenwood, Wisconsin 54437

## Legislative Report

The Wisconsin Legislature and the U.S. Legislature has been busy with other things besides the Military well being. The current list from my last quarterly report is still in committee or failed.

Here are two items that came up and here is the information.

### Ask your Senator to support H.R. 3967

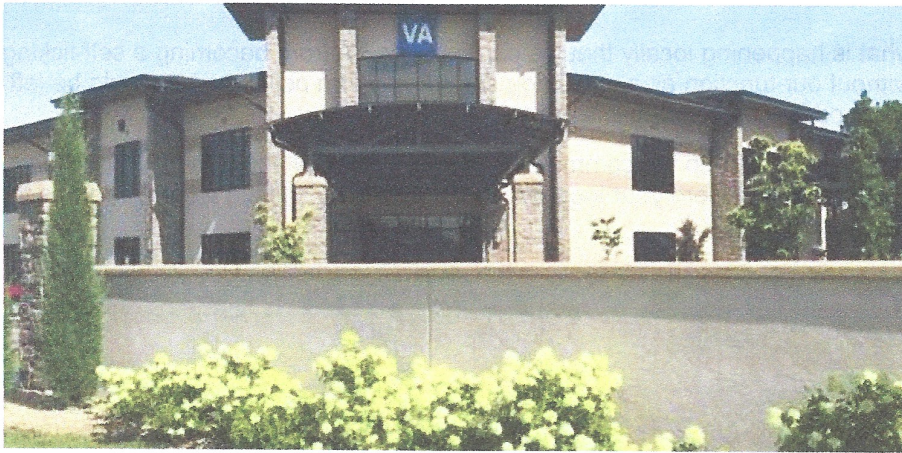
Ask your Senator to support H.R. 3967, The Honoring our PACT Act From Vietnam to the present day, members of the U.S. military have been exposed to toxic substances, both at home and abroad, which have killed many more than our enemy. For years, our government has hidden the ill effects of these toxicants from those who were exposed. And for years, the VA has denied their resulting claims. VVA fully supports H.R. 3967, the Honoring our PACT Act, introduced by Mark Takano (D-CA-41), that is designed to remove the many hurdles veterans are currently facing when submitting claims for health conditions they have succumbed to because of exposures due to their military service, whether in the jungles of Vietnam, the sands of the Persian Gulf, or the burn pits of Afghanistan. Too many veterans wait years to see their claims successfully processed and dispersed, and some even die waiting for the adjudication of their claims. This bipartisan legislation, when passed into law, would: Concede exposure to burn pits and toxic environments Provide healthcare based on toxic exposures Add 24 burn pit and toxic exposure-related diseases Add hypertension as a presumptive disease associated with Agent Orange exposure Provide a framework for establishing presumptive diseases in the future Expand radiation-risk activities to include veterans who participated in radiation cleanup at Enewetak Atoll and Palomares, Spain Including Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, American Samoa, and Johnston Atoll as conceded locations for Agent Orange Exposure Require registries for veterans who served at Ft. McClellan and for those exposed to PFAS chemicals Exposures to toxic chemicals are among the workplace hazards for members of the military, whether serving CONUS or during a deployment across the globe. We need to make it right for the more than 3.5 million veterans who suffer the long-term effects of exposure to these toxicants, which, in many instances, are equally as lethal as wounds inflicted by shrapnel and bullets. On March 3, 2022, H.R. 3967, the Honoring our PACT Act, passed the House of Representatives by a 256 to 174 vote. In addition, on March 29, 2022, the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill. We need 60 votes for the bill to pass in the Senate. Please contact your Senator NOW, and send the prepared letter, asking them to support passage of H.R. 3967, the Honoring our PACT Act, that will expand the list of named presumptive conditions for herbicide exposure to covered veterans

VA Secretary Denis McDonough statement on PACT Act  
May 27, 2022 by Department of Veterans Affairs

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
News Release  
Office of Public Affairs  
Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 461-7600  
www.va.gov

For Immediate Release

# PTSD/Substance Abuse Committee Update May/June 2022



**BY THOMAS C. HALL, PH.D., CHAIR**

Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Tip O'Neill is most closely associated with the phrase, "All politics is local." When advocating for veteran mental health benefits, it could be said that all mental health services are local.

Recently a veteran reported to the committee that in Joplin, Missouri, a brand-new mental health outpatient clinic was locked down on March 24 at 10 a.m. When the veteran discussed this with a local community provider the response was clear and direct: That's how they are.

This is not the first time veterans have told the committee about this kind of experience. In this case, the veteran was not notified of the closure or given an explanation about why the door was locked and services unavailable.

He eventually entered the clinic when an employee he was meeting used an entry card to open the door. When he later asked the VA behavioral health director in Fayetteville, Arkansas, about the closure, he was told that it was *not* a locked clinic, and that the only locked VA clinic was at Fayetteville.

I know this is not the VA's policy. All VA service is local and incidents like this make me wonder, "How is this helping with suicide prevention?"

As the committee continues to advocate for VA behavioral health and specialty clinics, especially those addressing PTSD and Substance Use Disorder, it is important to let us, as well as the VA, know what veterans are experiencing locally.

Now that COVID is receding, veterans have asked me when the VA will start reopening the continuing care groups for those managing PTSD. Many VA clinicians are telling their clients that 8-12 sessions of evidenced-based treatment is all they need or all the VA can offer.

However, they've missed one very important reality: We have memory. While evidenced-based treatment works very well for about half of veterans and reduces the worst of the impact of wartime experiences, it does not erase memory. Continuing care is the shock absorber ensuring a veteran in need has a place to go for the kind of reassurance and insights only offered with other veterans managing PTSD. Continuing care groups help veterans manage their symptoms while refocusing on skills and attitudes they learn after going through evidenced-based treatments.

Not all veterans respond to the evidenced-based treatment used by the VA, so the continuing care groups also offer a place for veterans to go to be with other veterans as they process some of the same emotional and psychological trauma and things that work for them. These groups help remind veterans of what they learned in previous treatments.

Simply attending the group sessions is, in itself, suicide prevention. These groups can also help keep symptoms of PTSD from adversely affecting veterans' lives.



We have seen a slow, steady erosion of these services at VA facilities. Closures due to COVID have further impeded the VA's ability to keep continuing care groups going. We need you to use your voices and share your experiences.

It is only by keeping tabs on what is happening locally that we can help the VA from becoming a self-licking ice-cream cone. In other words, without our function as a watchdog sounding alarm bells, the VA would be left only listening to those whose jobs depend on reports of how wonderful they are doing.

What gets measured gets attention. Please help the committee by letting us know about the positive things your local VA is doing, as well as the areas where your local VA could benefit by shining a light on areas that need attention.

May 27, 2022, 03:08:00 PM

## VA Secretary Denis McDonough statement on PACT Act

WASHINGTON — President Biden has stated we have a sacred obligation to support veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. As part of his first State of the Union address, he identified supporting Veterans as a key pillar of his [Unity Agenda](#) and an issue that can unite the country. The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act makes good on that promise.

In my [recent press conference](#), I spoke in detail about the Department of Veterans Affairs' strong support of the PACT Act because the bipartisan bill will help us advance one of the department's top priorities: getting more Veterans into VA care. President Biden has also been clear about his commitment to getting more VA health care to veterans impacted by toxic exposures, which is why we need Congress to send the PACT Act to his desk.

Study after study demonstrates Veterans in VA care do better — and this legislation could bring up to 3.5 million more Veterans into our care. The PACT Act would be one of the largest substantive health and benefit expansions in VA's history, comparable in scale and impact to the Agent Orange Act. It would codify many of the ongoing efforts by the department to improve its process for establishment of presumptions of service connection due to toxic exposure, reducing the burden for Veterans and increasing transparency.

We support the expansion of access to VA health care in the PACT Act and will work to ensure that the expansion of eligibility for health care does not result in the delay or disruption of care for those Veterans already receiving health care from VA.

I want to personally thank Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Jerry Moran (R-KS) for beginning to address the operational impact on VA by investing heavily in VA claims processing, VA's workforce and VA health care facilities. These investments and more are necessary for us to deliver the timely, quality services, benefits and care our Veterans deserve.

As always, we encourage Veterans to continue to file their claims for disability compensation and other benefits as we anticipate this legislation so VA can provide the benefits and care they have earned and deserve.

## ASK CONGRESS TO PRESERVE ARLINGTON NATIONAL PARK

The 2017 ANC report to Congress (3.2.2.3 Option 2C) provided a solution, to designate the location for the next national cemetery and maintain current eligibility standards. As the option indicates, Congress must direct this course of action to indicate a change of intent.

However, DoD has interpreted the 2019 NDAA as a directive to reduce eligibility for Arlington National Cemetery in order to keep it operational. Without congressional intervention, the change in eligibility puts the burden of a solution on the currently eligible service members and their families — including those who have long had Arlington as their place of rest.

The proposed eligibility changes for ANC will result in the cemetery reaching capacity at some point in the future and reduce an important military benefit. This plan "kicks the can down the road" and leaves the problem for future leaders to solve. When published, the proposed change in eligibility will limit interment to those with the Purple Heart or Silver Star and above. This change is discriminatory against past, present, and future service members who face danger at sea, in the air, in space, operating strategic nuclear forces, or fighting a pandemic at a medical facility.

Consequently, the Army has created an eligibility proposal that favors close combat specialties and does not account for our members' plans or for future service members unaware of an attempt to reduce their benefits.

VVA believes that the primary mission of Arlington National Cemetery is to function as the nation's premier military cemetery and shrine, honoring those men and women who served in the armed forces.

Please contact your Member NOW, and send the prepared letter, asking them to request that language be included in the FY 2022 NDAA, directing DoD to designate the next national cemetery that affords full military honors and to leave unchanged the current eligibility requirements earned through military service.