

Speaker of the House Mike Johnson voted against the PACT ACT... along with most other Republicans

Tony Farrell, October 29, 2023

According to an *MSNBC* broadcast featuring Charles Coleman Jr., Louisiana Representative Mike Johnson opposed passage of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT ACT) in 2022. (1)

A *Military.com* article dated October 25, 2023 confirms Johnson voted against PACT and also against a year-end package of smaller veterans and military family measures, though he has supported previous veterans legislation in the past. He has served on the House Armed Services Committee since 2021. (2)

I started this article as a criticism of the new Speaker of the House and a cautionary message regarding our PANAMA legislation. But the more I investigated it, the more I learned that Johnson was by no means alone in his dissent: All 222 Democrats voted in favor of passing the PACT ACT, joined by only 34 Republicans. **174 Republicans voted against the measure**, and 3 abstained. (3)

Why?

MSNBC reporting last July suggested two reasons: First, because fiscal conservatives disagreed with the way the bill was funded. The bill would reclassify nearly \$400 billion in VA spending from discretionary to mandatory accounts, which stoked fears that VA discretionary spending would rise. (4) Second, Republicans who were prepared to pass the legislation reversed course at the 11th hour in retaliation against Senate Democrats: Senate Democratic leaders passed a \$400 billion deal on domestic healthcare and climate legislation – a bill that Republicans including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell thought was dead. (5) (6) Republicans were widely criticized for turning their backs on veterans for no good reason.

Here is how Republicans sponsoring the PANAMA CANAL ZONE VETERANS ACT voted on the PACT ACT

YEA	NAY
Fitzpatrick (IL)	Salazar (FL)
Bilirakis (FL)	Miller (IL)
	Gimenez (FL)

If there's any good news here, it's perhaps that most Republicans *would have* voted for the PACT ACT had they not chosen party vitriol over the welfare of American veterans. (Conversely: most Republicans will choose party vitriol over the welfare of American veterans.) Put another way, one might say that, in the *absence* of party vitriol, most Republicans *would have* voted for the PACT ACT – which could mean the same might be true of the PANAMA CANAL ZONE VETERANS ACT, should it reach the full House for vote.

Presently, of the 30 Representatives who have sponsored/cosponsored the bill, less than 1/3 of them are Republicans – and that includes the original sponsor. **Democrats cosponsoring H.R. 2447 outnumber the Republicans two to one.** Only two Republicans sponsoring the PANAMA measure broke ranks with the party to support the PACT ACT – Congressmen Bilirakis (R-FL) and Fitzpatrick (R-IL).

The PANAMA CANAL ZONE VETERANS ACT is a different bill than the PACT ACT was, but it's hard not to think of a strong relationship between the two. My sense is, if the bill is forwarded to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) for review, the office may project the impact additional demand on the TEF Panama Veterans may have. (I say this solely because it seems to make sense to at least consider the TEF as a funding source.) Should the CBO consider funding the PANAMA legislation from the TEF, and should the CBO determine the TEF would require additional resources to meet the need, that could be reason enough to turn off fiscal conservatives again – Congressman Mike Johnson likely being among them.

(1) "‘A Surrogate for Trump’: Rep. Dean Sounds Alarm on New Speaker." *MSNBC*, MSNBC, 29 Oct. 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmb5dx84hNk.

(2) Kheel, Rebecca. "Here's How New House Speaker Mike Johnson Voted on Veteran and Military Issues." *Military.com*, Military.com, 25 Oct. 2023, www.military.com/daily-news/2023/10/25/no-

[pact-act-yes-defense-bills-new-house-speaker-mike-johnsons-voting-record-military-and-vets-issues.html](#).

- (3) “Roll Call 57, Bill Number: H. R. 3967, 117th Congress, 2nd Session.” *Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives*, 3 Mar. 2022, clerk.house.gov/Votes/202257.
- (4) I recall Rep. Bost (R-IL), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, mentioning in a Town Hall call that he had issues with how the Toxic Exposure Fund (TEF) was created. (Bost did not vote on the PACT Act.) Fun fact: Bost pointed out on that call that the VA is the second-largest bureaucracy in the world – The largest is the DOD.
- (5) “Why Did the GOP Reject a Bill to Help Veterans Exposed to Toxins?” *MSNBC.com*, 28 July 2022, www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/maddowblog/gop-reject-bill-help-veterans-exposed-toxins-rcna40474.
- (6) “What’s Great (and What’s Not) About Manchin’s Deal With Schumer.” *MSNBC.com*, 28 July 2022, www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/maddowblog/s-great-s-not-manchins-deal-schumer-rcna40403.