

## **Breaking News from the VA Committee- Passage of the PACT Act!**

The PACT Act, passed by the House and Senate and recently signed by President Biden, finally addresses the illnesses related to toxic exposure. The passage of the PACT act confirms the nexus between exposure and service, opening up Health Care and VA Disability benefits to those that previously were unable to prove a service connection between a health care issue and military service.

PACT is formally known as the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT). The act expands VA Health Care to all veterans who were exposed to toxic conditions and creates a presumptive service-related connection for veterans suffering from 23 different illnesses related to toxic exposure. Along with the combat veterans exposed in Afghanistan, the act expands presumptions related to Agent Orange adding Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, American Samoa and Johnston Atoll as locations of exposure. There are an estimated 3.5 million toxic exposed veterans who prior to this act were denied access to care for toxic exposure.

The act also will fund expanded research into toxic exposure, provide toxic related exposure education and training for VA health care personnel, and offer every veteran a toxic exposure screening during VA medical appointments where toxic exposure might be a factor.

To provide the additional screening and services, the act calls for the funding to add an additional 31 VA Health Care facilities across 19 states. Four additional outpatient clinics are scheduled to open in Florida, one in the vicinity of The Villages, another near Lecanto, one near Tampa and another in Sarasota. The clinics will be opened pending budget approval and appropriations of funds in 2023.

The PACT Act is named for Heath Robinson, an Ohio veteran who spent time in Kosovo and Iraq as a member of the Ohio National Guard. He served in the Middle East from September 2006 to September 2007 and was exposed to fumes from the burn pits used by the military to burn and dispose of various materials and waste. He passed away in 2020 from lung cancer related to his toxic exposure.