

New Senate Bill dubbed 'Most Significant' in History

Senators in March introduced a bill that VFW leadership calls the most significant veterans' legislation ever.

The Senate's *Comprehensive and Overdue Support for Troops*, or *COST*, of *War Act of 2021* would require VA to provide benefits to veterans suffering from 11 different conditions due to exposure to burn pits and other toxins. This would include coverage for veterans of all generations.

If signed into law, the *COST of War Act* would allow all veterans who were at risk of toxic exposure to obtain access to VA health care and benefits, including up to 3.5 million veterans who served in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. The bill also includes a clause that would add hypertension (high blood pressure) to the VA's Agent Orange presumptive conditions list.

The *COST of War Act* also will:

- Establish a consistent and transparent system that relies on medical and scientific evidence that connects presumptive conditions with toxic exposure.
- Require VA to examine military records for proof of toxic exposure.
- Strengthen VA's toxic exposure processes by requiring training for VA health care and disability claims processing personnel.

During a statement to the Senate VA Committee in April, VFW Veterans Legislative Service Director Patrick Murray said that Congress, with the help of veterans' service organizations, needs to develop a comprehensive solution for toxic exposure.

"During the last century, veterans returned home from war with an array of unexplained health conditions and illnesses associated with the toxic exposures and environmental hazards they encountered in service," Murray said. "Today is no different, and toxic exposure has become synonymous with military service."



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A Marine in March 2013 burns trash at Forward Operating Base Zeebrugge, Afghanistan. The *Comprehensive and Overdue Support for Troops Act of 2021* could allow all veterans who were at risk of toxic exposure to obtain access to VA health care and benefits.

VA Update

VA Now Processing New Agent Orange Presumptive Conditions

VA officials in May announced that the department will immediately begin processing disability claims with three new Agent Orange presumptive conditions.

The three conditions are:

- Bladder Cancer
- Hypothyroidism
- Parkinsonism

The conditions were added to the VA's list through a requirement in the *National Defense Authorization Act of 2021 (P.L. 116-283)*, which was signed into law on Jan. 1.

While the three new conditions are now recognized by VA, new conditions could be added by the *Comprehensive and Overdue Support for Troops of War Act of 2021*.

To qualify for Agent Orange-related VA benefits, veterans must have one or more of the conditions VA presumes to have been caused by exposure to the herbicide, including:

- Chronic B-cell Leukemia
- Hodgkin's Disease
- Multiple Myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma
- Prostate Cancer
- Respiratory Cancers
- Soft Tissue Sarcomas
- AL Amyloidosis
- Chloracne
- Diabetes Mellitus Type 2
- Ischemic Heart Disease
- Parkinson's Disease
- Early-onset Peripheral Neuropathy
- Porphyria Cutanea Tarda
- Bladder Cancer (added by *NDAA of 2021*)
- Hypothyroidism (added by *NDAA of 2021*)
- Parkinsonism (added by *NDAA of 2021*)

VFW urges veterans who served in or off the coast of Vietnam or Thailand to contact a VA-accredited VFW service officer to discuss whether they are eligible for disability benefits related to Agent Orange exposure. Visit www.vfw.org/nvs to find a nearby service officer.



FOR MORE INFORMATION about specific legislation or VA benefits, contact VFW's Washington Office at vfw@vfw.org. A member of VFW's National Veterans Service staff will respond as soon as possible.