

**The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services**

**Michelle Lujan Grisham** *Governor*

**Sonya L. Smith** *Cabinet Secretary*

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Burn-Pit Bill Headed to President Biden For Signature Into Law**

A bill that would expand health care benefits for millions of veterans exposed to toxic “burn pits” during their military service is heading towards President Joe Biden’s desk for signature into law.

The U.S. Senate, by an 86-11 vote, passed the [*Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act*](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3967)*,* more commonly known as the PACT Act, late Tuesday night. The bill had passed on a 342-88 vote in the House nearly three weeks earlier.

Once signed by the president, the new law will address and fund VA health care and research relating to veterans who were exposed to toxic substances, including burn pits--large trenches dug to burn and dispose of sewage, medical waste, and other trash--during their service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans exposed to the “Agent Orange” herbicide during the Vietnam War will also benefit. More than 20 toxic exposure-related conditions will now be covered by the new law.

Currently, the majority of burn pit disability claims related to burn pit exposure are denied by VA due to a veteran’s inability to prove their illnesses or cancers are linked to exposure to burn pits.

“This new law will make a world of difference for the millions of veterans suffering from health issues resulting from their military service,” said an ecstatic New Mexico Department of Veterans Services Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith. “For too long, too many veterans have suffered needlessly. We must now reach out to these veterans and their families, and let them know that help is finally going to be available.”

Cancer and other health issues alleged to be related to burn pits can develop years exposure. Such was the case for Ohio Army National Guard Sgt. Heath Robinson, for whom the bill is named after. Sgt. [Robinson died in 2020](https://www.lancastereaglegazette.com/story/news/2020/05/08/pickerington-veteran-39-dies-of-lung-cancer-blamed-on-burn-pit-exposure/3094619001/) from a rare lung cancer he long claimed was attributed to smoke exposure during his deployment to Iraq in 2006 and 2007. He and his wife Danielle became strong advocates for burn pit legislation after VA didn’t believe his cancer was service connected. Under the new law, veterans won’t have to prove that their illnesses are directly related to burn pit exposure to receive disability payments and assistance.

President Biden has repeatedly mentioned he would sign a burn pit bill sent to his desk. Danielle Robinson was a guest of the president when he delivered his State of the Union Address earlier this year.

Veterans who’ve been unsure about the validity of a burn pit or toxic exposure link to a medical condition, or who’ve had previous claims denied by VA, are urged to re-file a claim. Please contact DVS for assistance at (505) 383-2400 or nmdvs.info@state.nm.us.

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**The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services**

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) provides support and services to New Mexico’s 148,000 veterans and their families. DVS treats every veteran, regardless of their rank achieved during military service, with the respect and gratitude befitting someone who has served our country. We strive every day to live up to our agency’s official motto: *Serving Those Who Served*