

Senate Joint Memorial 202

Sponsored by Senator OLSEN, Representatives LEWIS, MEEK; Senators BAERTSCHIGER JR, GIROD, HANSELL, KNOPP, LINTHICUM, THATCHER, THOMSEN, Representative BARRETO (Pre-session filed.)

SUMMARY

The following summary is not prepared by the sponsors of the measure and is not a part of the body thereof subject to consideration by the Legislative Assembly. It is an editor's brief statement of the essential features of the measure **as introduced**.

Urges Congress to enact legislation that addresses medical care and disability compensation for veterans exposed to burn pits while serving overseas.

JOINT MEMORIAL

1
2 To the President of the United States, the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United
3 States of America, in Congress assembled, and the United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs:

4 We, your memorialists, the Eightieth Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon, in legislative
5 session assembled, respectfully represent as follows:

6 Whereas countless men and women serving in the Armed Forces of the United States were ex-
7 posed to open burn pits while on overseas duty in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere; and

8 Whereas burn pits varied in size from small pits used by units in forward combat positions to
9 massive pits such as the one at Joint Base Balad, which was 25 acres in size and burned hundreds
10 of tons of waste each day; and

11 Whereas burn pits were used for disposal of garbage, human waste, medical waste, military
12 equipment, paint, plastics and other harmful substances, and they were typically ignited using avi-
13 ation fuel; and

14 Whereas exposure to toxic fumes from burn pits has been linked to lung diseases, cancers and
15 other chronic and serious health conditions; and

16 Whereas burn pits in combat zones have largely been replaced by clean-burning incinerators,
17 but several large burn pits are still in operation in the Middle East and current policy allows burn
18 pits in areas where installing incinerators is not feasible; and

19 Whereas in an April 2019 report to Congress, the Department of Defense acknowledged that
20 burn pits are a health risk to our troops; and

21 Whereas under current policy, a veteran might have to prove that they served in the immediate
22 proximity of burn pits, rather than having their exposure presumed by the dates and location of
23 their service; and

24 Whereas the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) currently decides disability compensation for
25 health problems related to burn pit exposure on a case-by-case basis; and

26 Whereas although tens of thousands of veterans and their families are suffering, the benefits
27 claims of many veterans are bogged down in bureaucratic red tape, while the claims of other vet-
28 erans have been denied outright; and

29 Whereas the response of the VA to this looming health care crisis for our veterans has been
30 slow and ineffective; and

31 Whereas a comprehensive overhaul of the current system is necessary to ensure that our vet-

NOTE: Matter in **boldfaced** type in an amended section is new; matter *[italic and bracketed]* is existing law to be omitted. New sections are in **boldfaced** type.

1 erans receive the medical care and benefits they have earned by their selfless service; now, there-
2 fore,

3 **Be It Resolved by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon:**

4 That we, the members of the Eightieth Legislative Assembly, respectfully urge the Congress of
5 the United States to affirm its commitment to veterans by enacting legislation that addresses med-
6 ical care and disability compensation for veterans exposed to burn pits while serving overseas; and
7 be it further

8 Resolved, That a copy of this memorial shall be sent to the President of the United States, to
9 the Senate Majority Leader, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to each member of the
10 Oregon Congressional Delegation and to the United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

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