

Senator

*I am Bruce Carruthers, a Viet Nam veteran with a service-connected disability due to exposure to Agent Orange. (Substitute your information here.)* I am writing to encourage you to support S. 437, *Veterans Burn Pit Exposure Recognition Act*, reintroduced on February 24, 2021, by Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Dan Sullivan (R-AK)

This legislation provides a concession to veterans who served in areas where they were exposed to the toxic effects of burn pits. Practically, this means veterans who served in specific areas and at certain times that exposed them to the toxic effects of burn pits will be presumed by the VA to be entitled to medical treatment and compensation. (The locations and times will be determined by the Department of Defense and the armed services). As things currently stand, veterans are obligated to prove exposure to burn pits. This bill will express the sense of the Senate that the VA should presume veterans who were in burn pit areas have been adversely affected and are entitled to treatment and compensation.

According to a recent article in *Military.com*, (Why 2021 Could Be a Game-Changing Year for Veterans Sickened by Burn Pit Exposure) the VA has denied over 75 percent of disability claims based on burn-pit exposure. Veterans who have served in our longest wars should not be saddled with providing definitive proof that they were exposed to the toxins from burn pits. Instead, decisions on disability claims should always be made in the veteran's favor.

Senator, this is a very important piece of legislation for veterans. It took the VA decades to recognize the effects of Agent Orange on Viet Nam veterans. During this inexcusable delay, veterans and their families suffered the severe and often deadly effects of exposure to this toxic herbicide. The nation cannot allow the same thing to happen to veterans of our wars in the Middle East. The cost of war always includes the cost of caring for those who serve. This cannot be an empty slogan. To truly have meaning, it must be backed by medical care and compensation. Honor our veterans and support this legislation. If you are not a cosponsor, become one.

Sincerely

*Your name*