

House Veterans Affairs Committee Member Day Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Rep. Brad Wenstrup (OH-02)

Thank you Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Bost for holding this Member Day Hearing and for providing me the opportunity to testify on the important issues facing today's veterans. As a former member of the Committee, it is great to be back with you.

While I may have left the Committee, I certainly haven't stopped working for our nation's veterans. I know that one of the Committee's top priorities this year is dealing with toxic exposures, including open burn pits, that may have harmed our warfighters during their service and contributed to lingering health effects.

Having served in Iraq, I understand that in addition to the immediate dangers of war, there are costs of service that may not become clear until years later. That's the concern with burn pits, and their potential to cause disease years after exposure. The effects of burn pits, which were once a daily ritual in combat zones, have become a serious health concern to the servicemen and women who were exposed to them during their deployments.

As both a servicemember and a doctor, I am committed to promoting efforts to determine the health impacts of burn pits, and what can be done to assist those exposed. As co-chair of the Congressional Burn Pits Caucus with my friend Dr. Ruiz, I appreciate the work being done in the Veterans Affairs Committee to address the issue of burn pits and other toxic exposures to ensure that our servicemembers get the answers they deserve and the care they need.

I am proud to be a cosponsor of Ranking Member Bost's Toxic Exposure in the American Military Act, or TEAM Act. This is a serious proposal that will establish a new framework for dealing with toxic exposure issues, a framework I hope and believe will be much more successful than the long and difficult process of responding to Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam.

I'm also very interested in working to improve and expand the VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry. I am proud to lead the Burn Pits Registry Enhancement Act with Dr. Ruiz, which would direct the VA Secretary to ensure that upon the death of an individual on the burn pits registry, an immediate family member of the deceased individual or executor of the deceased person's estate may update the registry with the deceased individual's cause of death.

As the burn pits registry is expanded and Congress exercises oversight on burn pit related issues, this bill would help to improve accuracy in identifying causes of death of those individuals registered on the burn pit. This will help us get better data on the health outcomes of veterans exposed to burn pits, which will in turn make the registry a more useful tool to examine the effects of burn pit exposure and better inform our policies going forward.

As the Committee continues its work this year to prepare legislation addressing toxic exposures, I hope that you will consider the legislation I've discussed today as a key part of that effort.

Thank you once again for holding this hearing and giving me the opportunity speak on this incredibly important issue. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.