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September 23, 2020

The Honorable Thom Tillis
United States Senate
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tillis:

On behalf of DAV and our over one million members, all of whom were injured or made ill during wartime service, I write to offer our support for the Tillis-Tester substitute amendment to your legislation, S. 4393, the "Toxic Exposure in the American Military Act of 2020."

DAV was proud to work with you in strengthening this amendment to ensure that veterans exposed to toxic substances, including those who served near open air burn pits, have access to VA health care and benefits. The amendment would extend health care eligibility to all veterans exposed to toxic substances by expanding VA Priority Group 6 to cover veterans eligible for the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry or who received certain medals since the first Persian Gulf War. It further requires the Department of Defense to identify veterans who may have been exposed and makes them eligible as well.

The amendment would also permanently reauthorize expired presumptive processes for Agent Orange exposure and Persian Gulf War illnesses, as well as establish a new presumptive process for toxic substances. In addition, the amendment would require VA to enter into a contract with the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine to conduct studies regarding associations between diseases and exposure to toxic substances. It would also establish an independent "Toxic Exposure Review Commission" to review and make recommendations on such studies.

In accordance with DAV Resolution No. 049, adopted at our most recent national convention, which calls for legislation to ensure veterans exposed to toxic and environmental hazards receive all earned benefits and health care, DAV strongly supports this amendment.

Senator Tillis, thank you for your leadership on toxic exposures and your continuing efforts to build consensus for policies that will provide meaningful support to veterans harmed by these exposures. We look forward to working with you to pass this legislation.

Sincerely,


JOY L. ILEM
National Legislative Director

- c. Senator Jerry Moran, Chairman, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Senator Jon Tester, Ranking Member, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee