

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 11, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretaries Esper and Wilkie:

We write to ask the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to take immediate action to help ensure that servicemembers and veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances who may be at heightened risk of severe symptoms related to coronavirus (COVID-19) receive the care they need. By ensuring that each servicemember and veteran who tests positive for the virus is asked about their prior toxic exposure history during their first health assessment after the test, your agencies can work toward the collection of data that can assist medical professionals in better understanding the potential increased risk of severe symptoms that those who have served our country are facing during this public health crisis.

We urge DoD and the VA to implement procedures identical to those included in our *Pandemic Care for Burn Pits Exposure Act* (S.3868), which would require any servicemember or veteran who tests positive for COVID-19 to be asked during their next health assessment if they were previously based or stationed near an open burn pit, or were exposed to toxic airborne chemicals or contaminants. Many servicemembers and veterans are at higher risk for experiencing serious or potentially life-threatening symptoms should they contract coronavirus, and it is important that their doctors are aware of the potential adverse health impacts that burn pit exposure may have on COVID-19 patients.

More than 200,000 military personnel who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have signed up for the Department of Veterans Affairs' Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry to date, and the VA estimates that over 3.5 million veterans were exposed to burn pits. These veterans were exposed to a variety of toxic substances on military bases from burn pits, and servicemembers who worked in these areas are subject to higher rates of asthma, emphysema, and rare lung disorders.

We also request that you take action to ensure that servicemembers and veterans are aware of the resources that are available to them during the pandemic. Our veterans served us on the front lines, and we must serve them with the support and resources they need when they return home.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your response.

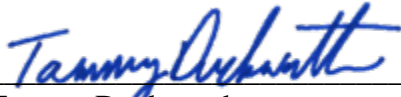
Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator