

VFW Presses Congress on Comprehensive Toxic Exposure Reform 'Long Past Due'

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WASHINGTON – During the first ever all-virtual testimony to Congress, Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander Hal Roesch called for the 117th Congress to get beyond partisan politics and work together to appropriately address toxic exposure during a special joint hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs held by video teleconference today.

The VFW delivered its top priority of toxic exposure reform, demanding Congress to develop a comprehensive solution for veterans who were exposed to toxic chemicals during their time in service. Roesch cited examples of toxic exposure throughout history, countering the notion that the claim is a new phenomenon.

“In World War I troops were exposed to gas, in World War II radiation, in Vietnam Agent Orange, in the Gulf War oil fires, and in Iraq and Afghanistan they were exposed to burn pits and other environmental hazards,” Roesch said. “Toxic exposure for our troops has been synonymous with service for more than a hundred years, but every time we’re faced with it, we act as if it’s never happened before.”

The VFW recommended Congress establish an independent commission, free of Department of Defense and Department of Veterans’ Affairs (VA) oversight, as well as partner with the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine to identify toxic exposures and evaluate their association to certain diseases. They also stressed Congress obligate the VA to accept toxic exposure claims for the sake veteran care.

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“The VFW believes Congress should require VA to grant a presumption of service connection for the conditions deemed to be associated with toxic exposures and environmental hazards,” said Roesch.

Roesch pointed to VFW testimony on the subject of Agent Orange in 1990. At the time, it was observed efforts to provide comprehensive benefits to veterans stalled due to the pursuit of ‘scientific certainty.’

“To overcome this, Congress implemented a process for establishing a presumption of service connection based on a ‘significant correlation’ between exposure and the onset of disease,” said Roesch. “Then, as now, we believe this represents a ‘fair and compassionate solution’ to a complex problem.

“We must create a framework that will take care of all past, present, and future generations of veterans; again, that is long overdue,” said Roesch.

Video of today’s testimony is available to watch and share [here](#). Read Commander Roesch's full testimony [here](#).