

VFW Calls on Congress to Pass Bills and Finally Address the Needs of Veterans

‘The time is now for Congress to change the way veterans receive health care and benefits to help save our lives’

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WASHINGTON — The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) made its presence known on Capitol Hill as National Commander Matthew “Fritz” Mihelcic testified in-person before the 117th Congress during a special joint hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs held today.

Mihelcic lead with the VFW’s top priority – toxic exposure. Over the past year, Congress took several pieces of VFW-supported legislation and put them together. The Senate’s *COST of War Act of 2021*, and House’s *Honoring our PACT Act of 2021*, each have a significant focus on burn pits and improving the Department of Veterans Affairs disability claims process. Mihelcic voiced the VFW’s support for each bill and urged Congress to pass both.

“For generations, veterans have returned home from war with an array of unexplained health conditions and illnesses associated with the toxic exposures and environmental hazards they encountered in service,” Mihelcic said. “Today is no different, and toxic exposure has become synonymous with military service.”

“The time is now to pass these bills and finally address the needs of sick and disabled veterans,” Mihelcic said.

The VFW voiced its concerns about the Department of Veteran’s Affairs handling of predatory claims representation practices, a rampant problem plaguing veterans that the VA has not seriously addressed. Mihelcic also admonished the VA in their way of adjudicating claims and appeals, such as toxic exposure, to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Military Sexual Trauma (MST).

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“Forcing these veterans to fight again and again for the treatment and benefits they have earned is not only cruel and unnecessary, it creates duplicative appeals claims in the system,” said Mihelcic. “The best way to make sure veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned, is to get it right the first time.”

Policies and processes affecting active-duty service members transitioning into civilian life was also point Mihelcic brought up during his testimony. While he stated that the VFW is pleased the Department of Defense has improved its Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and implementing a single unified Electronic Health Record, it still places great emphasis on ensuring veterans receive the best counseling and mentorship before they leave military service.

“Transition information needs to be pushed to service members throughout their time in uniform,” Mihelcic said. “TAP classes need to be restructured so service members are not, as we’ve heard frequently, ‘drinking from a firehose.’”

After the conclusion of his remarks, members of the joint session were given time to ask the VFW panel a variety of questions, most of which were fielded by Mihelcic himself. When asked about the importance of passing the Honor Our Pact Act, Mihelcic did not shy away from calling out those who opposed the bill.

“How can any right-thinking American not vote for this PACT Act?” said Mihelcic. “If you are on the fence, you need to get off the fence. You need to pick a side.”

“History will remember those people who did not vote to pass the PACT Act,” said Mihelcic.

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