



Jon Stewart, Other Veteran Advocates Join VFW in a ‘Call on Congress’ for PACT Act

VFW National Commander says senators, ‘Don’t let us continue to die while you debate’

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — More than 120 people showed for a “Call on Congress” event outside of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) National Headquarters Tuesday afternoon, urging senators from Missouri and Kansas to pass the [Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2021](#) or *Honoring our PACT Act*.

“The cost of war must include the cost of taking care of our injured and sick veterans,” said VFW National Commander Matthew “Fritz” Mihelcic to a rousing applause from the crowd. “Every veteran that has been in harm’s way has earned the right to health care.”

Lead by Mihelcic, speakers at the gathering included Kansas Congresswoman Sharice Davids, celebrity comedian and talk show host Jon Stewart, as well as representatives from Disabled American Veterans, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Wounded Warrior Project and Burn Pits 360. During the 51 minute event which was streamed live on [Facebook](#), speakers took time to emphasize the importance of passing the PACT Act without delay.

“To our esteemed senators, pass the PACT Act now,” said Mihelcic. “Honor your commitment to the veterans that you sent off to fight your wars. Don’t let us continue to die while you debate.”

“The cost of war must include the cost of peace,” concluded Mihelcic.

Introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives last year, the critical bipartisan legislation supported by [42 Veterans Service Organizations](#) and veteran advocates like Jon Stewart, was specifically written to conclusively address toxic exposure as a cost of war. In March,

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the Honoring our PACT Act [passed](#) in the House with a broad bipartisan vote, and moved on to the U.S. Senate.

“I’m here to join the millions of toxic-exposed veterans who have struggled in silence, who have felt ignored and unheard,” said Davids, the 3rd District representative who co-sponsored the bill. “I hope that my colleagues on the Senate side will join us and do the right thing.”

Other speakers at the event included Tom Porter of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Brent Whitten of Wounded Warrior Project, Jim Bunker of Disabled American Veterans, Will Wisner of Burn Pits 360, Kristina Keenan of the VFW’s National Legislative Service, and veteran advocates Kevin Hensley and Jon Stewart. With the exception of Stewart, each of the Veteran Service Organization (VSO) representatives that spoke at the event were veterans themselves and seasoned their remarks with examples of their own experiences and sacrifices.

“When you got orders to go... did any of you go to your commander and say ‘Excuse me, Sir, I’m not sure this is fiscally responsible,’” asked Porter addressing the veterans in attendance. “No, you didn’t. You just went because it was the right thing to do.”

“You did think that when you got back that people were going to take care of you,” said Porter.

“A promise made is a promise kept ... to this veteran right here, holding on to one of his last breaths,” said Hensley referring to himself while holding his air tube.

Hensley, an Air Force veteran, operated open air burn pits during four of his eight deployments to the Middle East. In 2017, Hensley was diagnosed with constrictive bronchiolitis, a terminal lung disease that requires him to wear a portable oxygen concentrator to assist his breathing.

“Our nation has a moral obligation to ensure the health and welfare and dignity for quality health care and benefits owed to them because of illness caused by their service,” said Hensley.

Longtime veteran advocate Jon Stewart addressed the gathering last. He spoke of the disparities cost spent on wars verses costs spent on health care, shared anecdotes of lives lost due to the effects of toxic exposure and did not mince words with regards to legislators who campaign on patriotism.

“You can’t be ‘America First’ if you keep putting our veterans last,” said Stewart.