

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 16, 2023

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20571

Dear Secretary McDonough:

We write today to urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to use the authority granted under Title II of the *Honoring Our PACT Act of 2022* (PACT Act) to create a new presumption of exposure to burn pits, substances, chemicals, or airborne hazards for individuals stationed in Kosovo from 1999 onwards—including veterans who served in the NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR).

According to the Department of Defense, at least 25,033 active duty and Army National Guard soldiers have been sent to Kosovo since 2004.¹ Some of these soldiers, including Vermont and New Hampshire National Guardsmen, were stationed at military bases in Kosovo near dumps where waste is disposed of by burning. Here, civilians regularly dump tires, plastic, rubber, gas cans, batteries, household trash, and industrial trash. According to documentation originating from various KFOR bases provided to our offices from the National Guard:

- When the trash is burned, wind blows smoke from the dump directly above Camp Nothing Hill in Northern Kosovo at all hours of the day and night, exposing servicemembers to smoke inhalation. Physical training at the camp has been periodically cancelled due to health concerns posed by smoke inhalation.²
- From 2018 to 2020 at Camp Nothing Hill, 22 of 22 sampling periods exceeded both the Military Exposure Guidelines (MEG) and the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for long-term exposure to certain particulate matter.³
- In 2021 at Camp Bondsteel in Eastern Kosovo, 17 of 22 sampling periods exceeded both the MEG and the NAAQS for the same particulate matter exposure.⁴

¹ Email from Department of the Army, to Staff, Office of Senator Peter Welch (Mar. 17, 2023).

² Vermont Army National Guard, *Camp Nothing Hill Burn Pit* (Received Jan. 2023).

³ Department of the Army, *Air Quality Summary Report for Camp Bondsteel, Camp Film City, Camp Novo Selo, and Camp Nothing Hill*, at 2 (Feb. 2022).

⁴ *Id.*

- From 2018 to 2020 at Camp Film City in Pristina, 24 out of 24 sampling periods exceeded both the MEG and the NAAQS for long-term particulate matter exposure. According to another analysis, the air quality at the camp in 2019 and 2020 was “unhealthy” 50% of the time, “very unhealthy” 20% of the time, and “hazardous” 5% of the time.⁵
- From 2018 to 2020, 23 of 24 sampling periods at Camp Novo Selo/Camp Marechal De Lattre De Tassigny in Northern Kosovo exceeded both the MEG and the NAAQS for long-term particulate matter exposure.⁶

As you know, symptoms from sustained exposure to toxic substances manifest later in life with chronic effects on service members’ health and physical performance. Veterans have passed away from toxic exposure-connected diseases such as glioblastoma, having been diagnosed up to 45 years after the beginning of their service.

Congress passed the PACT Act to ensure that veterans exposed to burn pits, airborne hazards, and other toxic exposures can access the VA benefits and health care services they have earned. The bill also established a process through which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs can establish new presumptions of exposure for veterans who served in certain locations during certain time periods.

Therefore, we ask that the VA begin the process of adding a new presumption of exposure to burn pits, substances, chemicals, or airborne hazards for service in Kosovo—specifically from June 1999 onwards—to the list of covered deployment locations. This policy would ensure that Kosovo veterans receive access to the same presumptions of service connection for the conditions established under Section 406 of the PACT Act that veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan currently receive.

Please provide a written response with the department’s plans for creating a new presumption of exposure by May 30, 2023.

Our veterans have risked their lives to protect us, and we must do all we can to honor their service by caring for them when they come home.

Sincerely,



Peter Welch
United States Senator



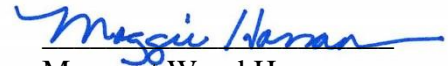
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

⁵ North Atlantic Treaty Organization Kosovo Force, *Possible Health Hazards Due to Air Pollution in the Area of Pristina*, at 1 (June 2021).

⁶ Department of the Army, *Air Quality Summary Report for Camp Bondsteel, Camp Film City, Camp Novo Selo, and Camp Nothing Hill*, at 3 (Feb. 2022).



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Becca Balint
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



Ann Kuster
Member of Congress

Enclosures