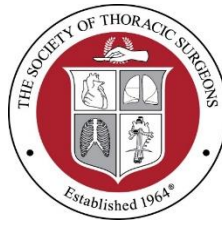


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October 1, 2019

Sent via email

The Honorable Raul Ruiz, MD
2342 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
2227 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: H.R.4086, Protection for Veterans' Burn Pit Exposure Act of 2019

Dear Congressman Ruiz and Congressman Bilirakis,

On behalf of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS), I would like to thank you for introducing H.R.4086, the Protection for Veterans' Burn Pit Exposure Act of 2019, which would provide care and resources for veterans if the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (National Academies) determine that there is a positive correlation between exposure to burn pits and serious illness.

Founded in 1964, The Society of Thoracic Surgeons is a not-for-profit organization representing more than 7,200 surgeons, researchers, and allied health care professionals worldwide who are dedicated to ensuring the best possible outcomes for surgeries of the heart, lungs, and esophagus, as well as other surgical procedures within the chest. The mission of the Society is to enhance the ability of cardiothoracic surgeons to provide the highest quality patient care through education, research, and advocacy.

Reports have indicated that U.S. veterans who were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan have a higher rate of contracting cancer and constrictive bronchitis which may be due to exposure to open-air burn pits,¹² a common way to dispose of waste at military sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. Your legislation would call on the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to use studies already being conducted by the National Academies to determine if a "presumption of service connection" is warranted. Such a designation would allow veterans to receive certain benefits if it is determined that they became ill due to burn pit exposure.

STS strongly supports our nations' veterans. Many STS members work as a part of the VA system, or are veterans or active military members themselves, and care for veterans and service members every day. This legislation will help us to better identify and monitor those patients who may be at risk of

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/us/burn-pit-exposure-likely-leads-to-higher-cancer-mortality-rate-among-army-vets-new-study>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/12/us/politics/veterans-burn-pits-congress.html>

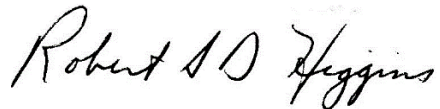
October 1, 2019

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developing life-threatening conditions so that we might be able to intervene earlier and help save the lives of our nations' heroes. It is imperative that the VA determine if an association exists between illnesses or disease and exposure to burn pits – and provide for adequate support and treatment for those illnesses if the association exists.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. Please contact Courtney Yohe Savage, STS Director of Government Relations, at cyohe@sts.org or 202-787-1230 should you need additional information or clarification. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert S.D. Higgins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" and "H".

Robert S.D. Higgins, MD
President