

VFW-Supported Burn-Pit Bill Introduced to House

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A bill introduced to the House could provide veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars who were exposed to burn pits the same VA medical care as Vietnam War veterans exposed to Agent Orange.

The VFW-supported Jennifer Kepner Healthcare for Open-Air Burn-Pit Exposure (HOPE) Act, H.R. 4137, was introduced to the House by Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-Calif.) in August.

If passed and signed into law, H.R. 4137 would add vets exposed to toxic fumes from burn pits to the VA's priority group 6, meaning it would allow veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars the same treatment as veterans exposed to toxic chemicals.

VFW National Legislative Director Carlos Fuentes said Ruiz also is working on a separate bill that could provide compensation benefits for conditions that are known to be associated with burn-pit exposure.

"This important legislation would make individuals eligible for hospital care, medical services and nursing home care, provided the individual served as a member of the armed forces in support of a contingency operation and was based or stationed at a location where an open air burn pit was in use after Jan. 1, 1990," Fuentes said. "The eligibility for care would be open even for those who have insufficient medical evidence to conclude that a disease or disability is associated with burn pit exposure."

The bill is named in honor of Air Force veteran Jennifer Kepner, of Cathedral City, Calif. She died from pancreatic cancer "due to the open exposure burn pits" while serving in Balad, Iraq, in 2004 as a medic, according to her obituary from The Desert Sun in Palm Springs, Calif.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

“Jennifer Kepner was a hero who courageously battled pancreatic cancer while fighting for her fellow veterans suffering from pulmonary conditions and rare cancers linked to burn-pit exposure,” Ruiz said. “I am humbled to introduce the Jennifer Kepner HOPE Act in her memory, legislation that will ease the financial burden on sick veterans who have served and sacrificed for our nation by reducing their health care costs from the VA.”

This article was featured in the November/December 2019 issue of [VFW magazine](#).