



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation applauds the signing of the PACT Act by President Joe Biden to expand Veteran Health Care Services

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 11, 2022



PHOTO: Members of Diné Saani Silaoltsooi post colors for the 2022 Spring Council Session.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Speaker Seth Damon and the 24th Navajo Nation Council applaud President Joe Biden for signing into law the bipartisan Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act to strengthen health care and expand benefits for toxic-exposed veterans in more than 30 years.

The new law will assist the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in delivering proper care and benefits to 3.5 million veterans and their survivors presumptively suffering from more than 20 toxic exposure-related conditions. These conditions are from burn pits and other toxins causing cancers, asthma, and other chronic illnesses from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the first Gulf War, and the Vietnam War.

“The PACT Act marks the most significant expansion in VA health care services for our veterans in 30 years. Families of war veterans now do not have to hit roadblocks they faced in the past for treatment of conditions related to toxic exposure from burn pits. There are thousands of our Navajo warriors who served in Iraq and Afghanistan that were exposed while defending our freedom. The United States has a sacred trust obligation to our veterans and their families to provide them the best care possible,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

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According to the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, since 2021, there are approximately 14,000 Diné veterans. Many reside in rural areas of the Navajo Nation, making the lack of local VA services and access to resources even more challenging.

“Our Navajo veterans that served since the Vietnam War are qualified for these new benefits, and we urge them to apply now. There are many respiratory illnesses and rare cancers among our veterans because they were exposed to toxic smoke from burn pits,” said Resources and Development Committee Chairman Rickie Nez (T’iistsoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tsé Daa K’aan, Newcomb, San Juan).

The PACT Act is expected to total nearly \$300 billion in new spending over the next decade and will require the VA to hire hundreds of new workers and open several medical sites for newly enrolled veterans.

“The PACT Act is one of the most important changes to veteran support policies in decades, and it will provide health care to individuals who are still suffering the wounds of war years after leaving the battlefield. Many of our Navajo veterans depend on the critical services the VA provides and should not be traveling hundreds of miles for care. The Navajo Nation will continue to hold the Veterans Administration accountable as they begin to enroll millions of veterans for benefits now guaranteed by the PACT Act,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain).

Last year, Delegate Begay sponsored Resolution No. NABIAU-25-21 passed by the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee, reaffirming previous requests to Congress and the Biden Administration to establish direct services for veterans in the Navajo Nation.

In a statement from the White House, President Joe Biden added, “For the millions of veterans who may have been exposed to harmful toxins, this act means quicker access to health care services and other benefits. This could be the difference between life and death for many suffering from toxic-related illnesses. For the spouse or child of a service member who died from toxic exposure, struggling to put their lives back together, this law will be a lifeline. It means a monthly stipend for a surviving spouse and kids and access to tuition benefits to help cover the cost of college. It means access to life insurance, home loan assistance, and help with health care. It matters.”

All veterans and their supervisors are encouraged to apply for PACT Act benefits by visiting the VA website: <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>.

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