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Bishop/Shea-Porter Provision to Prohibit Toxic Burn Pits in Iraq and Afghanistan Passes House

*Hundreds of veterans report illnesses after exposure to toxic burn pits
Bishop/Shea-Porter provision would ban improper use, protect health of troops*

Washington, DC — At the urging of national military and veterans organizations representing millions of service members and veterans, the House of Representatives passed an amendment offered by **Representatives Tim Bishop** (D-NY) and **Carol Shea-Porter** (D-NH) that will end the irresponsible use of open-air burn pits. The Bishop/Shea-Porter amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (HR 2647) would require the Defense Secretary to prohibit the disposal of medical and hazardous waste in open-air burn pits during a contingency operation lasting longer than 12 months. It also would require the Secretary to submit a report to Congress on the use of such burn pits and safer alternatives.

“I introduced this amendment with Congresswoman Shea-Porter because we should not continue to recklessly use burn pits to dispose of hazardous waste across Iraq and Afghanistan,” **said Congressman Bishop**. “Our troops should be free to focus on fighting the enemy without worrying how their lives may be further endangered by breathing in toxic air from their own bases.”

“Burn pits expose our troops to dangerous toxins that can cause long-term health problems,” **said Congresswoman Shea-Porter**. “When they deploy, our service members put their lives at risk and do not deserve to suffer this added, unjustifiable risk.”

The Bishop/Shea-Porter amendment was strongly endorsed (see below) by the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, National Guard Association of the United States, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Veterans and Military Families for Progress.

Earlier this month, sick veterans and their families, scientists and veteran advocates held a press conference at the U.S. Capitol to promote a bill by Reps. Bishop and Shea-Porter (HR 2419) to require a full investigation into the effects of burn pits and to prohibit their continued use. The key provisions of HR 2419 have been incorporated in the National Defense Authorization Act, which the House passed today.

There is mounting evidence that veterans may be ill—and some may have actually died—as a result of exposure to dangerous toxins produced by these burn pits. A significant number of the roughly two million service members who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan have been exposed to these toxic burn pits, and hundreds of returning veterans are now displaying similar health symptoms.

For additional information and reports, please see www.burnpits.org.

Endorsements from National Organizations

The American Legion:

“Clearly prolonged the prolonged exposure to the smoke and ash resulting from the burn pits is unhealthy for our troops. The American Legion supports the Bishop-Shea-Porter NDAA amendment to ban burn pits coming to House floor tomorrow and urges Congress to pass the NDAA amendment.”

Disabled American Veterans:

“Hundreds of current and former service members have reported to DAV that they were heavily exposed to fumes from numerous, extremely large burn pits around Iraq and Afghanistan. The majority of these troops reported that they became ill during such exposure and that their illnesses have continued to worsen after such exposure. The DAV does NOT perceive this as a coincidence. ...Therefore, the DAV thanks you for having the foresight to stand up for veterans by trying to limit the unregulated and long-term use of dangerous and irresponsible open air burning of waste.”

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America:

“More than six years into the war in Iraq and eight years into the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. military continues daily disposal of hundreds of tons of war-zone waste in a crudest and hazardous manner—open-air burn pits... By limiting the use of open air burn pits, this amendment helps protect members of the Armed Forces from exposure to potentially hazardous waste while serving their country, and directs the DOD to account for all of the hazardous materials that can potentially harm our military personnel.”

Military Officers Association of America

“More and more service members have come forward with various symptoms and life-threatening medical conditions after being exposed to burn pits used to dispose of waste in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

National Guard Association of the United States:

“Our members already exposed to the hazards of combat deserve protection from unnecessary self-generated environmental hazards. They and their families who will share in the harmful effects of these hazardous environmental exposures deserve nothing less than the protection this amendment would provide.”

Veterans of Foreign Wars:

“...we believe, as you do, that incinerating toxic waste materials at military bases in Iraq and

Afghanistan are likely responsible for a growing number of illnesses affecting soldiers coming home to the US. Moreover, despite growing concerns over the widespread open-air burning of trash, only about half of 41 incinerators the military purchased four years ago to combat the problem are in operation. Thank you for taking the lead on this initiative and for your continued support of our armed forces and military veterans.”

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