



Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. ®

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VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

Chairman's Remarks

THE PACT ACT HAS PASSED! Whew. Beginning to wonder if it would ever happen. We were starting to nickname it the "Ping-Pong Bill" since it had gone back and forth so much. But it will become law on August 10 in a rose garden ceremony. We are sending Brian Moyer and Bill Rhodes to represent MVA. Both worked hard on that bill and deserve the trip and the chance to see it become law.

OK, time to get back to work. We have a lot of things left to do and elsewhere in this newsletter you will see our 2023-2024 legislative agenda. Panama and Okinawa lead the way but there are other important items that will affect all veterans. So, drain that last champagne glass and put the bottles back on ice. It's time to get back to work.

I'm not going to go into the firestorm that occurred after the failed cloture vote except to say that it really never affected the bill's passage. Within an hour after the failed vote, I talked one on one with a Senator who voted no and got a bit of the inside story. He assured me the bill would pass and in fact he voted for the final bill. I'm not going to reveal what he told me because it was in confidence but there was a lot of inside baseball going on that had nothing to do with the bill. Unfortunately, what you see up on the Hill is not necessarily what you get. I told the Senator it was a bad move and I suspect he probably agrees with me now, but we had to let it play out. Of course, 1954 emails sent to various Senate offices of both parties, via the MVA bill of the week system, helped put them all on notice that it was time to do the right thing.

I made a decision to relax the rules on our Facebook pages because I felt people needed to vent. It was a bad decision. The political comments quickly got out of hand. So, we are back to strictly enforcing the rules. Here is why we do that:

First of all, we are a 501c3 organization not a 501c4 or a 501c19. That means we operate under different rules. We are required by law to remain non-partisan. The IRS can get mean at times and this is one of the things they get mean about. We have already gone through one audit in 2019 and passed with flying colors. I do not want to go through another one. So, if I am a little gun shy that's why.

Secondly, we have folks from Congressional staffs who monitor our Facebook pages. We encourage that. It does not help to have people tearing down the folks we are asking for help. People are people and when attacked they get their hackles up. To be honest, most of the political posts are based on preconceived notions that are usually wrong. Most of the people on the Hill do want to help. We have a good reputation on the Hill because we work both sides of the aisle and keep our political positions to ourselves.

I acknowledge that many of our members, especially those from Panama, Okinawa, Fort McClellan, and ships outside the Vietnam territorial seas turned off the television or slammed down their laptops and said, "What about us?" Good question and a fair question. The answer is that MVA has not forgotten you and we are moving forward. It took Blue Water over 10 years of effort to get their benefits and admittedly we didn't cover everyone. We have been

fighting for Guam and Thailand over six. We started working with Panama about 2 ½ years ago and Okinawa after that. It is not a sprint - it's a marathon. We've learned a lot over the past decade or so and we are sticking with you. We have an aggressive plan for the 118th Congress and if we fail, we will be back for the 119th.

We need your help however. Our new Legislative Director, Brian Moyer, has put out a request for volunteers to form a communications team for Panama and Okinawa. We have used that approach in the past for Blue Water, Guam, and Thailand. It works! Basically, we will be sending emails and making phone calls to the Congressional offices asking for their support. Remember this is often an education problem. There are 435 Representatives, 6 delegates, and 100 Senators who need to be educated. I think I have been in every office on the Hill at one time or another. Remember we are volunteers and some of us still have day jobs.

The other thing we need is financial support. So far in 2022 we have lost almost \$17,000.00. We had built up a cushion during the covid pandemic so we are not in danger of closing our doors - yet. But we cannot sustain that kind of loss forever.

What do we spend the money on? We have had to hire employees to help manage the organization. It got too big for me to do it as a volunteer. I think all of you who have dealt with Robin will agree she has been a great asset and frankly we don't pay her what she is worth. Quentin has also excelled and has helped us provide services to the membership we could not anticipate before. But he has finished his Masters program and will be moving on sometime this year. We have a replacement but again this costs money.

Travel is a big chunk of the budget. We have conducted several educational trips, which is part of our mission, and although we don't stay in 5-star hotels and we fly Southwest (or cheaper), it costs money. We have had several trips to Congress as well. Hotel prices are expensive in the DC area and frankly those park benches in Lafayette Park get pretty cold in February, so we do like to have a place to sleep.

My law office has paid for over half the office rent and the annual dues at a private club in DC where we can eat and save about 10-15% on meals. All of the equipment used by MVA from computers to printers to furniture is paid for by my law office. And don't tell my wife how much I personally contribute. But folks, that will not go on forever.

Our annual rif-raf (rifle raffle) and breakfast brought in some money but not enough. Our Saints ticket raffle is pure profit since the tickets were donated but our Military History and Fall Foliage trip is losing money. Folks this is a great trip. Yes, the tickets are \$100.00 per chance but the trip, if you win, is worth over \$3000.00. And yes, I am paying my own way.

We have a number of folks who have received or will receive six figure settlements from their VA claims but have seemed to forget who made it possible to get those claims. The generosity of some of our Blue Water Navy veterans has helped keep us going. Yet we still have many who said, "I've got mine - to hell with the rest of you." In addition, we have numerous folks on our free pages who do not even pay the membership fee. This has forced us to consider getting rid of the free pages and make them members only. That has not been decided but is under consideration. The deck log page is now behind a pay wall. Sorry but Mike Yates spends an inordinate amount of time on this project and we have to deal with members first.

Also on the chopping block is our legislative tracking program that allows us to track all veterans bills and take a position. It also includes our bill of the week program. We were able to negotiate a great introductory cost but we project next year's cost to be around \$20,000.00. As of now we cannot afford it and unless things change, we will drop that program.

If we do not increase our income, our effectiveness as an organization will be severely curtailed. The loss of the legislative program in itself will prevent us from supporting good veterans legislation and opposing legislation that is not so good. Not counting PACT, other MVA supported bills have become law. Several others have passed one House and will be enacted later in the year.

So folks, MVA's future is up to you.
Until next month, stay steady on course.

John B. Wells
CDR USN (ret)
Chairman



BILL OF THE WEEK

Please support the MVA™ bill of the week. It takes a minute to register and seconds to send the pre-written email to your Member of Congress and Senators. This allows you to provide your input to Congress, support MVA™, and support your fellow veterans. Please scroll through and support all or some of our bills of the week.

<https://www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org/bill-of-the-week.html>

Your MVA Board has put in over 6500 hours so far in 2022



TAKE A CHANCE ON A TRIP TO NEW ENGLAND THIS AUTUMN

Labor Day is the drawing for the Military-Veterans Advocacy® Military History and Fall Foliage tour. Take a chance at this tour of historic spots in Southern New England. This October 23-27 six lucky winners and their guest will tour the historic 18th century streets of Newport, Rhode Island and Boston, Massachusetts with side trips to the Naval War College Museum, Battleship Cove, Lexington, and Concord. Meet CDR John Wells and Princess Susie Belanger and you will walk the Freedom Trail seeing the sites that launched the American Revolution and the USS Constitution, the oldest commissioned ship in the United States Navy. All of this against the background of New England's beautiful Autumn. Proceeds go to MVA™ to help us continue our program of Litigation, Legislation, and Education on behalf of veterans. Raffle tickets are \$100.00. Only 500 tickets have been printed which gives participants a 1.2% chance of being chosen. Trip value is approximately \$3500.00. Airfare is NOT included. Drawing will be on Labor Day. For tickets go to:

https://www.flipcause.com/secure/cause_pdetails/MTUyMjky

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Last month, Military-Veterans Advocacy Chairman CDR John B Wells, USN (ret) and Vice-Chairman Sgt. Major Jim Kuiken USMC (ret) blitzed Capitol Hill with 24 meetings in 4 days. Discussion centered around the adoption of the PACT Act and herbicide relief for the Panama Canal Zone and Okinawa as well as several other bills. It was a busy week, but the team was well received. Congress is in recess in August so the next planned trip will be September.



MVA™ Chairman CDR John B Wells USN (ret), Congresswoman Mayra Flores, TX-34, and MVA™ Vice-Chairman Sgt. Major Jim Kuiken USMC (ret) after discussing Military-Veterans Advocacy's legislative agenda last month in Washington D.C.

WHAT IS THE PACT ACT?

OK the PACT ACT has passed. Now what? If you are eligible, get your claim in now! Not tomorrow! Today! Reserve your place in line.

The PACT Act does the following:

- Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras.
- Expands eligibility for presumption to those who served in Guam, American Samoa, Johnson Island, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.
- Expands benefits for the effects of radiation in places like Enewetok, Palomares Spain, Thule Greenland, and Uzbekistan.
- Adds more than 20 new presumptive conditions for burn pits and other toxic exposures
- Adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation
- Requires VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care
- Helps improve research, staff education, and treatment related to toxic exposures

For more information see <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/#whats-the-pact-act-and-how-wil>

WHAT'S THE STORY ON HYPERTENSION?

Hypertension will be covered BUT maybe not immediately. The effective date for hypertension as a presumptive is October 1, 2026 unless the veteran is (I) terminally ill; (II) homeless; (III) under extreme financial hardship; (IV) more than 85 years old; or (V) capable of demonstrating other sufficient cause.

However, you should still put your hypertension claim in now. Another provision of the law states that the Secretary may grant benefits if a connection (nexus) can be shown between the hypertension and military service. Additionally, the law states that the Secretary cannot “deny a claim for benefits under title 38, United States Code, for a condition or disease for which this Act establishes a presumption of service connection because the claimant filed the claim prior to the effective date or date of applicability for that particular condition or disease.” What does that mean? We will probably have to litigate it but for now make those claims and if denied let us know ASAP.

MONOCLONAL GAMMOPATHY

This invasive cancer is also covered. Claims for Dependency Indemnity Compensation take effect when the bill is signed. Other claims will take effect October 1, 2022. According to Wikipedia, this cancer is a plasma cell dyscrasia in which plasma cells or other types of antibody-producing cells secrete a myeloma protein, i.e. an abnormal antibody, into the blood; this abnormal protein is usually found during standard laboratory blood or urine tests. It

resembles multiple myeloma and similar diseases, but the levels of antibodies are lower.

MVA™ 2023-2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Now that the PACT Act has passed, MVA™ is looking ahead to the next Congress. The MVA™ Board has approved the following items to the MVA™ primary agenda:

1. Earlier effective date for Guam (Aug 15, 1958)
2. Herbicide benefits for Panama
3. Herbicide benefits for Okinawa
4. Require a timeline for VA response to rulemaking requests
5. Appellate reform
6. Extend the Blue Water line to the original Vietnam Services Medal line
7. Address rare blood disorders
8. Expand the Clear & Unmistakable error provisions
9. Benefits for Fort McClellan
10. Cover dependents exposed to Toxic Exposures
11. Maintain FPO/APO privileges for military retirees overseas

An aggressive agenda, but then MVA™ is an aggressive organization.



MVA™ Board Member at Large, Susie Belanger, at the Atomic War Veterans Memorial Event



VETERANS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

Summary and Timeline of the Thailand Legislation

It all began in March 2016 by requesting legislation. After much work with my Senator and Representative, legislation was first introduced in Congress on Nov. 8, 2017 by Senator Boozman (AR). The legislation was written to give all veterans stationed in Thailand presumptive for exposure to herbicides containing toxins as listed in 38 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations).

The legislation was kept active by reintroduction in each new Congress.
The Thailand Legislation was included in a much larger toxic exposure bill and passed by Congress on Aug. 2, 2022.
The President is scheduled to sign the PACT Act into law on Aug. 10, 2022.

Bill Rhodes
Director, Veterans of Southeast Asia™
Military-Veterans Advocacy®

If you have questions about membership, contact Robin Barr at Robin.Barr@madvocacy.org

Be sure to visit our online marketplace. We offer a variety of products from all of our sections and are continuing to add new products. <https://military-veterans-advocacy.square.site/>