



# PRESS RELEASE

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 13, 2024

No. 24-1  
Contact: Mokie Porter  
301-996-0901

## VVA National President Jack McManus Testifies Before Joint House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

(Washington, D.C) – Vietnam Veterans of America National President Jack McManus presented VVA's 2024 legislative priorities and policy initiatives on March 13, 2024, before the joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees.



*[Jack McManus testimony begins at 2:25:12]*

[Watch the Testimony Here](#)

In his testimony, McManus highlighted several of VVA's top legislative priorities and policy initiatives:

- Assure full funding of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency so that the 1,577 unaccounted-for American servicemembers from VVA's long-ago war and their survivors can finally find some peace.
- Honor the lifetime of service of disabled Vietnam veteran and Bronze Star recipient Thomas Corey (1944-2022) by passing the *Renaming the VA Medical Center in West Palm Beach, Florida, in Honor of Thomas H. Corey Act* (H.R. 7333).

*Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the nation's only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated to the needs of Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA's founding principle is "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another."*

- Pass the *Donut Dollies Congressional Gold Medal Act* (H.R. 3592) to recognize the service of the 627 Donut Dollies who volunteered with the Red Cross during the Vietnam War to serve in perilous, frontline positions.
- Hold an oversight committee hearing on the *Toxic Exposure Research Act*, which calls for intergenerational research, with the VA Secretary as star witness, to investigate what metrics he used that empowered him to not follow the law.
- Amend the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act 2019* (P.L. 116-23) to extend the arbitrary twelve-nautical mile limitation sufficient to include U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Vietnam veterans who were assigned to the Vietnam Theater of Combat Operations or received the Vietnam Service Medal.
- Call for research on pre-Gulf War burn pit use, including all veterans who were exposed to any toxicants and are still waiting for answers as to their long-term effects. This will begin the work towards the equitable care and treatment of all toxic-exposed servicemembers, and address a misstep in the *PACT Act* that excluded veterans who served in locations outside of the Middle East and West Asia or before the Gulf War.
- Maintain close oversight of the implementation of the *PACT Act*, including a transparent review of how TEF dollars are being or will be spent. While VVA is opposed to spending caps on toxic exposure research, it would welcome congressional oversight on spending to ensure that money is being spent in a way that will benefit veterans and their families.
- Compel the VA to execute the Fort McClellan epidemiological study required by the *PACT Act* to ensure that veterans and others impacted by toxic exposure at Fort McClellan are informed about their right to participate and receive healthcare. Congress must make regular inquiries about toxic exposures on domestic and overseas installations, so that veterans and their families can mitigate the harm caused by toxic exposure.
- Stop delaying and pass *The Major Richard Star Act* (H.R. 1282/S. 344) to allow combat-disabled military retirees to receive full retirement pay and disability benefits simultaneously.
- Enact legislation reinstating the 48-hour VSO-review period for disability claims. The current Claims Accuracy Review (CAR) program is failing, with approximately 50% of claims initially denied, and a staggering 80% containing errors at the Board of Veterans Appeals. Reinstatement would allow VSOs to dispute erroneous conclusions and point to errors, improving claims outcomes for veterans and reducing the need for participation in the appellate process.
- Enact legislation prohibiting the reduction of VA disability compensation for incarcerated veterans, placing any balance above 10% into an escrow account until a veteran's release date. By holding justice-involved veterans' money in escrow, we can reduce instability and help them return as productive members of society once they have served their time.
- Act to ensure that a reciprocity agreement with South Korea is entered into immediately so that the veterans covered by the *Korean American VALOR Act* (2023) can get the healthcare they rightly deserve.
- Address the persistent challenge to access healthcare in rural Puerto Rico by amending the Puerto Rican tax code to draw more healthcare workers. A chronic issue for the Commonwealth is the shortage of employees within the Puerto Rico VA healthcare system. As the veteran population continues to age – 63.9% of veterans in Puerto Rico are aged 65 or older - the need for healthcare workers will continue to increase. Congress must act to eliminate this barrier to care.
- Order the VA to reinstitute the use of physician assistants as mental health treatment providers at VA hospitals and clinics to address the historic difficulties with access to mental healthcare for veterans. Permitting PAs to practice in this space will allow for the dramatic expansion of access to mental health services for our nation's veterans.

[Read VVA's Full Legislative Agenda Here](#)

---30---