

## Other Areas of Concern

### **Unaddressed Toxic Exposures**

Veterans frequently contact the VFW about toxic exposures not included in the *Honoring Our PACT Act of 2022* (Public Law 117-168). Examples include but are not limited to water contamination at Fort McClellan, Alabama, and those who served as air crews, nuclear technicians, and submariners. This legislation established an enduring framework for a presumption decision process to guide the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) ongoing, systematic evaluation of toxic exposures. Ensuring transparency and accountability in these evaluations requires consistent congressional oversight.

The VFW urges Congress to conduct oversight hearings to ensure VA's transparency and compliance in administering the PACT Act's presumption decision process.

### **Cracking Down on Predatory Claims Companies**

While the VFW respects the right of veterans to choose who assists with VA disability compensation claims, we remain deeply concerned about unaccredited actors who exploit earned benefits. These entities we call Claim Sharks often charge veterans exorbitant fees for services that are otherwise available at no cost. They suggest that their high volume of business makes them more effective than accredited representatives and falsely imply that their involvement can secure faster decisions or higher disability ratings. The VFW supports legislative efforts that require VA accreditation for anyone assisting with the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of claims; any associated fees to be reasonable and never put veterans into debt; and safeguards to protect against unaccredited, predatory actors.

The VFW urges Congress to pass legislation to truly prohibit the exploitation of veterans by unscrupulous Claim Sharks and strengthen the VA accreditation system, and to oppose legislation like H.R.3132, *CHOICE for Veterans Act of 2025*, that would put veterans seeking their earned benefits into debt.

### **GI Bill Improvements**

Despite an increase in deployments since September 11, 2001, National Guard and Reserve members do not always earn their VA education benefits at the same rate as active duty service members. Currently, Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility is based on active duty service for at least 90 days. Initial skills and training periods are deemed non-qualifying service for those in the reserve components, and full-time National Guard service and certain responses to national emergencies do not qualify. In addition, the book stipend associated with the Post-9/11 GI Bill has not been increased since 2009, and students in online learning programs currently receive a housing stipend rate that is only half the national average.

The VFW urges Congress to pass H.R.1423 / S.649, *Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2025*, to create equity for National Guard and Reserve members by allowing any day in uniform for which military pay is received to count toward Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility; H.R.1965, *Veteran Education Assistance Adjustment Act*, to increase the book stipend from \$1,000 to \$1,400 for veterans using Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits, and include annual increases for the stipend based on the Consumer Price Index; and H.R.3753, *Expanding Access for Online Veteran Students Act*, to increase the monthly housing stipend to the full national average rate for students in approved online courses of study.