

**S.111, “Open Burn Pit Registry” Signing
Governor Scott Remarks
June 17, 2019**

Governor Scott: Thank you, President Schneider for welcoming us here today. Norwich University represents the rich history of Vermonters’ role in conflicts around the world.

It’s an honor to be here at the Woody Williams Gold Star Families Memorial, and I’m pleased to have been able to support its construction through funds raised at my first Inaugural Gala.

We’re here today to sign [S.111, An Act relating to the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry.](#)

I want to start by thanking Senate Pro Tem Tim Ashe, Senator White and members of the Government Operations Committee for spearheading this legislation, as well as the House General Committee and many more legislators who supported it and are here today.

Most importantly, I want to recognize and thank the veterans and families who are the real reason we’re here.

That starts with June Heston. Last year our state lost an incredible Vermonter – June’s husband, General Mike Heston, who had been battling cancer.

General Heston served in the Vermont State Police for 26 years, as well as in the Marine Corps Reserve and Vermont Army National Guard. He was deployed to Afghanistan and served his state and country bravely with June by his side.

Without June’s passionate advocacy for this bill, we might not be here today.

I’d also like to recognize and welcome Sgt. Wesley Black, a veteran of two tours overseas with the Vermont Army National Guard, and Pat Cram, who also lost her husband, Sgt. Major Mike Cram, to cancer. I had the honor of visiting Mike at his home days before he passed away.

I want to thank all of you for your service, and your sacrifice to our nation.

And, I want to thank you for standing up and speaking out; for testifying and sharing your personal stories and struggles in hopes others won’t have to endure what you and your families have.

One of the things I’ve always admired about members of our military is the deep commitment our service men and women have – not only to our nation, but to one another. We see that commitment on display in your actions and hear it in your words. I know protecting your fellow soldiers and families is part of your duty, but you deserve our gratitude for doing so with honor.

We’re here to make S.111 law because it’s our responsibility as civilians, and as a government, to do whatever we can to support the brave men and women who serve in our armed forces. We’re here to honor and support America’s one percent.

Since the attacks on our nation on September 11, 2001, it’s been the one percent of Americans who’ve served in the military and put everything on the line to keep the rest of us– the 99 percent – safe here at home.

I’ve always been in awe of those who put themselves in harm’s way and risk sacrificing their lives to protect others. They – including many here today – run towards danger when most of us instinctively run from it. You’re distinguished by your willingness to sacrifice yourself for the greater good.

And as our brave soldiers have served, and continue to serve, in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, the last thing they should have to worry about while in a foreign and hostile land is being exposed to harmful toxins at their own base.

We know that burn pits were used during the first Gulf War and in Operation Iraqi Freedom, in Afghanistan in Operation Enduring Freedom, and in Southeast Asia. And, the science is clear: toxins in burn pit smoke can have detrimental health effects. So, we must make sure the soldiers who were exposed know what resources are available to them.

This bill requires the Vermont Commissioner of Health and the Adjutant General work together to develop, and make available, information about the health effects attributed to chemical exposure from burn pits. They'll also make sure our servicemembers know about, and have access to, the Burn Pit Registry and any and all available resources. This will include the Vermont Environmental Health Coordinator at the V.A. in White River Junction.

It also requires the Vermont National Guard and Office of Veterans Affairs to directly contact all known veterans in Vermont who may be eligible for the Registry, and it makes the information readily available to Vermont's healthcare providers. This information can be critical for early and potentially life-saving diagnostics.

I'm confident our dedicated teams at the Health Department and the Adjutant General's Office will expedite this work for our service members, past and present.

###