LEGISLATIVE OUTLINE: THE SEACR ACT OF 2026

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE

- Establishes the short title of the legislation as the “Submarine Exposure and Combat Recognition Act of 2026” or the “Submarine Exposure and Combat Recognition Act”.

SECTION 2. DEFINITIONS

- Defines ten key terms utilized throughout the Act to establish strict legal parameters, including:
    - **Covered Submarine:** Any US Navy submarine operating on or after January 1, 1947, regardless of propulsion or commissioning status.
    - **National Defense Operations:** Official missions executed under Combatant Command or Navy directive, explicitly excluding routine transits, sea trials, and dependent cruises.
    - **Sea Service Time:** Cumulative time assigned or embarked on a covered submarine, including direct support elements (DIRSUP) and Special Operations Forces.
    - **Toxic Exposure:** Unmitigated continuous inhalation, ingestion, or absorption of inherent toxicants in the submarine atmosphere.
    - **Atmospheric/Medical terms:** Clarifies hyperbaric, hypobaric, normobaric, hypoxia, and toxicant.

TITLE I—VETERANS AFFAIRS, TOXIC EXPOSURE PRESUMPTIONS, AND COMBAT-RELATEDNESS

SEC. 101. FINDINGS

- Outlines the Congressional findings regarding the unique physiological hazards of the closed-loop submarine atmosphere, the reality of Medically Unexplained Chronic Multisystem Illness (MUCMI), the prolonged latency of diseases, and the failure of current VA adjudication frameworks.

SEC. 102. ESTABLISHMENT OF SUBMARINE TOXIC EXPOSURE REGISTRY

- Directs the VA to create a registry tracking long-term health outcomes for submariners.
- Explicitly mandates the tracking of exhaustive contaminants identified in military and NRC reports, categorizing them into Chemicals/Compounds (e.g., Benzene, MEA, DBNP), Vapors/Particulates (e.g., diesel exhaust, aerosolized waste, dioxins), and Toxic Gases/Environments (e.g., Hypoxia, Freon).

SEC. 103. SUBMARINE TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

- Mandates the creation of a targeted screening questionnaire developed in direct collaboration with qualified submarine veterans.

SEC. 104. CLASSIFIED WEAPONS LOADOUTS AND RADIATION EXPOSURE PRESUMPTIONS

- Statutorily bypasses the DoD's "Neither Confirm Nor Deny" (NCND) policy, prohibiting the VA from denying radiation claims due to redacted weapons manifests.
- Establishes a presumption that nuclear weapons were present on board based on the submarine class's capability.
- Acknowledges the inadequacy of historical dosimetry devices and historical radiation restricted zones (e.g., the MCUL).

SEC. 105. EVIDENTIARY STANDARDS FOR CLASSIFIED SUBMARINE OPERATIONS AND GEOGRAPHIC EXPOSURES

- Prohibits the denial of geographic-based toxic exposure claims (e.g., Agent Orange) due to classified or redacted navigational deck logs.
- Presumes exposure if the veteran deployed to a qualifying theater (e.g., WESTPAC), shifting the burden of proof to the government to prove the submarine was *not* there.
- Elevates lay evidence (buddy statements, photos, diaries) as definitive proof of geographic presence.

SEC. 106. CONCESSION OF EXPOSURE AT NAVAL FACILITIES DESIGNATED AS EPA SUPERFUND SITES

- Concedes exposure to identified EPA Superfund contaminants for veterans assigned to or trained at sites like SUBASE New London, Mare Island, and Charleston Naval Shipyard.
- Eliminates the requirement for individual proof of direct physical contact with the contaminants and mandates medical nexus opinions consider the synergistic impact of these exposures.

SEC. 107. TOXIC EXPOSURE RISK ACTIVITY (TERA) COHORTS

- Automatically includes documented submarine duty in all applicable TERA cohorts, recognizing both atmospheric toxicants and weapons/propulsion radiation.
- Establishes a distinct, dedicated TERA cohort exclusively for Navy submariners to account for synergistic closed-loop exposures.

SEC. 108. STATUTORY PRESUMPTION OF SERVICE-CONNECTION

- Establishes a comprehensive list of presumptive service-connected conditions, including:
  - **Cancers:** Leukemia, brain, digestive, endocrine, respiratory, and 16 other specified cancers.
  - **Respiratory/Sleep:** Asthma, COPD, Mesothelioma, Sleep Apnea.
  - **Vision/Hearing:** Retinal hemorrhage, loss of dark adaptation, tinnitus, ototoxicant-induced vestibular dysfunction.
  - **Autoimmune/Cardiovascular/Endocrine/GI:** Including Lupus, MS, Coronary artery disease, Hashimoto's, GERD.
  - **Mental/Neurological/Reproductive:** Anxiety, PTSD, ALS, Frontotemporal dementia, sterility.
- Ensures these presumptions apply universally to all embarked personnel, regardless of MOS, NEC, rank, or specific duty station within the vessel.

SEC. 109. CONCESSION REGARDING INADEQUATE SERVICE TREATMENT RECORDS...

- Concedes that historical submarine medical records were chronically inadequate, handwritten, and minimized due to OPSEC and cultural stigma.
- Prohibits the VA from using a lack of in-service medical records as negative evidence against the veteran and elevates lay evidence for medical symptoms.

SEC. 110. ADMINISTRATIVE AND PROCESS REFORMS

- Mandates VA-wide training on submarine exposures, electronic health record identification, and expedited processing tracks for these specific claims.

SEC. 111. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBMARINE DEPLOYMENTS AS COMBAT DUTY

- Statutorily classifies all National Defense submarine deployments from 1947 to present as Combat Duty, fulfilling Title 10 criteria for armed conflict and hazardous service.
- Opens eligibility for Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC).
- Explicitly excludes non-combat submersibles (DSV and NR-1) from this specific combat classification.

SEC. 112. SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON SUBMARINE ATMOSPHERES AND SYNERGISTIC TOXICITY

- Directs holistic VA and DoD physiological research analyzing the additive interactions of chemical mixtures under both normobaric and hyperbaric conditions.

SEC. 113. DYNAMIC EXPANSION OF RECOGNIZED CONTAMINANTS AND PRESUMPTIVE CONDITIONS

- Provides an automatic mechanism to add newly identified toxicants and related health conditions to the registry and presumptive lists without regulatory delay.

SEC. 114. RE-EVALUATION OF PREVIOUSLY DENIED CLAIMS AND RETROACTIVE EFFECTIVE DATES

- Allows veterans previously denied benefits to file supplemental claims without needing new medical evidence of a service connection.
- Authorizes retroactive back pay to the date of the original claim and mandates VA outreach to locate previously denied veterans.

SEC. 115. EQUITABLE RELIEF AND PROTECTIONS FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES AND DEPENDENTS

- Protects survivors by waiving the standard 1-year DIC filing deadline and substitution deadlines.
- Posthumously presumes a Section 108 condition was the cause of death if discovered, shifting the burden of proof to the VA.

TITLE II—ACTIVE DUTY COMPENSATION AND DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE REFORMS

SEC. 201. AMENDMENT TO TITLE 37 TO RECOGNIZE THE INHERENT IMMINENT DANGER OF SUBMARINE OPERATIONS

- **The Fiscal Shield:** Expressly prohibits the retroactive payment of Imminent Danger Pay (IDP) to protect the DoD budget from 75 years of backpay.
- Formally authorizes prospective IDP for active-duty submarine deployments under Title 37.
- Ensures concurrent receipt of IDP alongside Submarine Duty Incentive Pay and Career Sea Pay.
- Prevents external administrative bodies from downgrading the imminent danger classification once a deployment commences.

SEC. 202. MANDATED REVISIONS TO DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REGULATION

- Directs the Secretary of Defense to update DoD 7000.14-R within 60 days to execute the IDP authorization while maintaining OPSEC protocols regarding tactical data.

SEC. 203. EXTENSION OF COMBAT VETERAN STATUS FOR SUBMARINE SERVICE

- Statutorily recognizes veterans as Combat Veterans based on Sea Service time, protecting embarked riders (Navy SEALs, DIRSUP, Intel) and non-qualified personnel who were subsequently disqualified.
- Excludes DSV and NR-1 from this specific classification.

SEC. 204. AUTHORIZATION AND EQUALIZATION OF SUBMARINE PATROL INSIGNIA

- Mandates the creation of two new submarine patrol insignia for non-SSBN (diesel, fast attack, and guided missile) patrols.
- Awards the insignia retroactively to all eligible personnel, including embarked riders and non-qualified personnel.
- Statutorily equalizes all four submarine patrol insignia (SSBN, Combat, and the two new ones) as equal combat awards in military uniform manuals.