SUBMARINERS' ADVOCACY GROUP
Submariners Helping Submariners
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Submarine Exposure and Combat Recognition (SEACR) Act of 2026

THE INEQUITY: CLASSIFIED OPERATIONS AND ADMINISTRATIVE GAPS

- **Classified Operations & Closed-Loop Hazards:** Since 1947, the Submarine Force has continuously executed sensitive classified operations in support of national defense. Crews live and work for extended periods within a continuously recycled atmosphere that is unique and incomparable to any other environment in the U.S. military.
- **Documented Contaminants:** Internal military research documents the presence of more than 130 potential contaminants and hazards unique to this environment, including reduced oxygen levels, elevated carbon dioxide, chemical contaminants, degraded lubricants, and radiation hazards.
- **The Reality of Chronic Illness:** A 2023 Department of Defense-funded study involving more than 26,000 submariners demonstrated significantly elevated prevalence rates of chronic respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine, neurological, and systemic illnesses in their final year of service.
- **The Classification Barrier:** Because relevant operational records, atmospheric monitoring data, and deployment information remain classified, submarine veterans face significant barriers to obtaining the documentation required to substantiate service-related exposures. As a result, this documentation gap limits their access to VA healthcare, disability compensation, and benefits tied to these exposures.
- **Fiscal Cost-Shifting:** Because these exposures are not formally recognized, the VA often denies these claims, shifting healthcare costs across multiple federal programs, private insurers, and families.
- **Epidemiological Data Fragmentation:** This denial structure dilutes submarine veterans into the wider civilian healthcare population, fragmenting critical data on long-term health impacts.
- **Stalled Medical Advancement:** Compounded by the absence of a centralized VA submarine exposure registry, this gap in federal accountability hinders long-term health surveillance and prevents advances in targeted healthcare treatment protocols.
- **The Administrative Gap:** The administrative avenues available to the Submariners' Advocacy Group (SAG) have been exhausted. After SAG sent multiple letters to DoD and Navy leadership—including SECDEF, SECNAV, and the CNO—SUBLANT responded in writing that it has neither the resources nor authority to resolve the issue.

THE SOLUTION: A DUAL-TITLE REFORM

TITLE I: Veterans Affairs, Exposures, Presumptives, & Healthcare (SVAC Jurisdiction)

- **Navigates Classification Barriers:** Prohibits the VA from denying claims solely because veterans cannot produce classified operational records or atmospheric surveys.
- **Establishes Statutory Exposure Recognition:** Directs the VA to recognize qualifying submarine service as evidence of toxic, hazardous, and radiation exposures within a closed-loop environment.
- **Creates a Submarine Exposure Registry:** Establishes a dedicated registry to track long-term health outcomes and support epidemiological research.
- **Directs Targeted Medical Research:** Requires focused scientific study into the cumulative and synergistic health effects associated with prolonged submarine service.
- **Establishes Presumptive Service Connection:** Creates a framework for recognizing specific conditions determined by medical evidence to be associated with submarine service.
- **Domestic Exposure Oversight (Section 106):** Requires the VA to formally recognize documented occupational hazards at domestic submarine bases officially designated as EPA Superfund sites.
- **Survivor Protections:** Provides equitable relief for surviving spouses and dependents by addressing procedural barriers that delay claim adjudication.

TITLE II: Military Service Recognition and Combat Parity (SASC Jurisdiction)

- **Deployment Recognition (Day-One Combat Status):** Establishes statutory recognition for submarine deployments conducted under National Defense tasking, providing combat parity without compromising OPSEC.
- **Imminent Danger Pay Authorization:** Amends Title 37 to authorize Imminent Danger Pay for qualifying deployments, correcting a decades-long inequity.
- **Protection of Embarked Personnel:** Universally extends combat status and benefits to Navy SEALs, intelligence personnel (DIRSUP), and others who share the exact same operational hazards.

THE FISCAL SHIELD: PROTECTING THE DOD BUDGET To ensure fiscal responsibility, Section 201(a) includes a strict Rule of Construction explicitly prohibiting the retroactive payment of Imminent Danger Pay. This prospective framework shields the Department of Defense from historical back-pay liability, reducing the budgetary impact while preserving the Act's primary objectives.

ACTION REQUESTED: Review, support, and consider co-sponsorship of the Submarine Exposure and Combat Recognition Act of 2026 to address longstanding healthcare, exposure recognition, and military equity issues affecting veterans of the United States Submarine Force.

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