



DONALD AND BARBARA  
ZUCKER SCHOOL of MEDICINE  
AT HOFSTRA/NORTHWELL

June 25, 2022

Dear Presidential Medal of Freedom Committee,

I enthusiastically nominate Rosie Torres for the Presidential Medal of Freedom!

Between 1998 and 2015 I was Allergy Section Chief, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Northport, NY. In 2007 my team first reported new onset asthma from Iraq and Afghanistan Deployments among burn pit exposed soldiers related to exposure to high particulate matter air pollution concentration, described deployment related rhinitis in 2008, coined the term Iraq Afghanistan War Lung Injury (IAW-LI) in 2011, based on lung function testing data, developed animal models with burn pit base dust in 2014, tested candidate drugs in mice in 2018, and co-invented new candidate medicines this year.

Exposure to high concentrations of particulate matter air pollution regardless of composition is well known in the medical literature to be associated with increased death rates (mortality), cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks and stroke, new onset COPD and severe asthma. Our Balad, Iraq air pollution data came from the US Army Public Health Command.

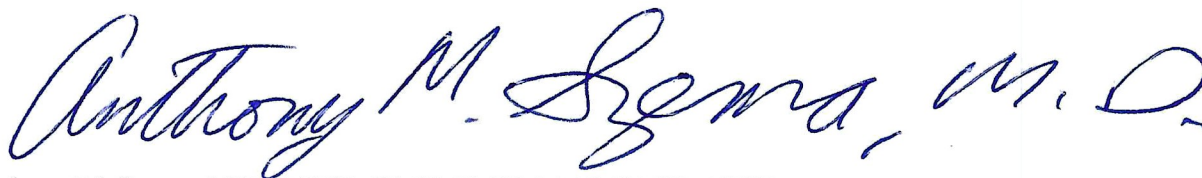
The team in my office sees numerous patients post deployment with a variety of symptoms which include shortness of breath, cough, and chest tightness that is accentuated with exercise. I have diagnosed post burn pit exposed soldiers with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung fibrosis, carbonaceous lung, constrictive bronchiolitis, titanium lung, bladder cancer as well as pulmonary ossification or bone in the lung. These are previously healthy, non-smoking, fit for deployment soldiers who have newly acquired lung disorders after their tours of duty. In severe cases, for example, my patient with lung fibrosis, required two lung transplants and died last December.

**As an expert in the field, I have concluded that these lung disorders are directly related to exposure to airborne hazards.** These ailments resulted from inhalational exposures to burn pits, dust storms, improvised explosive devices, as well as blast overpressure from mortar fired rounds.

For the past thirteen years, despite pushback from the VA and the DOD, Rosie Torres has worked tirelessly to advocate for soldiers, veterans, and their families to obtain health care post deployment after Iraq and Afghanistan via her work as Executive Director of Burnpits360.org. Without Rosie, and the coordination of wives of military personnel who initially lobbied their Congresspersons, the bill submitted by Congressman Tim Bishop would not have led to the Open Air Burn Pit Registry Law signed by President Obama. Furthermore, the continued, sustained work by Rosie Torres led to testimony before the US Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and the US Senate Armed Services Committee, which led to the recent passage of a bipartisan bill called the PACT Act, which will be the most significant, exponential growth of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and will specifically target presumption of health care coverage for returning troops. President Biden has indicated he will sign this, which largely gained publicity based on the media coverage Rosie Torres arranged by partnering with Jon Stewart. I can think of no other person who has had the tenacity and has endured the financial struggles to persist in the face of insurmountable pressure to do what is right for servicemembers exposed to burn pits and airborne hazards of war. We need more Americans who can work in a bipartisan fashion and advocate what is right for the health of those patriotic women and men who fight for our freedom.

Rosie Torres is *insignis pietate*—remarkable for goodness!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anthony M. Szema, M.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anthony M. Szema, M.D., FCCP, FAAAAI, FACP, ATSF

Member, Columbia University Global Psychiatric Epidemiology Group

Site PI, Co-Investigator CDC NIOSH U01 OH011308 "9/11 Trauma and Toxicity in Childhood: Longitudinal Health and Behavioral Outcomes"

Consultant, NIH R01 HL152385 "Childhood Mass Trauma Exposure, Inflammatory Programming and Psychopathology in Young Adulthood"

Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine, Divisions of Pulmonary/Critical Care and Allergy/Immunology

Clinical Associate Professor of Occupational Medicine, Epidemiology, and Prevention

Director, International Center of Excellence in Deployment Health and Medical Geosciences, Northwell Health Foundation

Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell

Faculty, Internal Medicine Residency Program at Mather Hospital, Northwell Health

Research Assistant Professor, Department of Technology and Society, College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Stony Brook University

Faculty Committee on Health Professions (Pre-Med Committee), Stony Brook University

CEO, RDS2 Solutions, Inc. (RDS2solutions.com)

Principal Investigator: A Manufacturing and Technology Research Consortium MTRC Feasibility Award Agreement

Feasibility Study MTRC Project 20181129.1196

Managing Member, Three Village Allergy & Asthma, PLLC (threevillageallergy.com)