



March 31, 2021

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chairman
Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
House Veterans Affairs Committee
B234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Bost
Ranking Member
House Veterans Affairs Committee
3460 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

CC: Senator Tina Smith and Congresswoman Grace Meng

Dear Chairmen Tester and Takano, and Ranking Members Moran and Bost,

On behalf of our over 2.3 million members of the Association of Mature American Citizens (“AMAC”) and of which hundreds of thousands are veterans, we strongly urge enactment of H.R. 1585 and S. 565, the “Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act,” as introduced by Senator Tina Smith and Representative Grace Meng. This legislation would provide for the treatment of veterans who participated in the cleanup of Enewetak Atoll, the site of substantial nuclear testing, as radiation exposed veterans for purposes of the presumption of service-connection of certain disabilities by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

It is also fitting that legislation honors its original 114th Congress sponsor Representative Mark Takai of Hawaii, who tragically died of cancer in his first term.

The Atomic Veterans are retired and former members of the Armed Services who were exposed to radiation during the years following the end of World War II. Between 1945 and 1962, about 225,000 members of our Armed Forces participated in hundreds of nuclear weapons tests, as well as the cleanup of the radioactive residues and contamination on the Enewetak Atoll in the South Pacific. Moreover, thousands of other GIs were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation as a part of the U.S. military occupation forces during World War II in Japan, and those who were held as POWs in and around Hiroshima and Nagasaki before 1946.

All were sworn to secrecy, unable to even talk to their doctors about their past exposure to radiation. It is vital to note the unique nature of this group of Atomic Veterans and the urgent need to recognize their service. No other cohort has been recognized as eligible for specialized testing and treatment by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

However, this group has been recognized by three former presidents for their unique service:

- President Reagan designated July 16, 1983 as National Atomic Veterans' Day;
- President Bush recognized this group as a discrete cohort of American veterans who are eligible for compensation by the Department of Justice under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act of 1990; and
- President Clinton issued a public apology in 1995 following the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments' landmark report.

Tragically, upwards of 80 percent of American Atomic Veterans have already died *before* the COVID-19 pandemic. Time is running out for these veterans and we are very concerned how many more we will lose to the pandemic because of their age and vulnerability.

S. 565 and H.R. 1585 increases their access to treatment by VA and should be enacted quickly this Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Carlstrom". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bob Carlstrom
President
AMAC Action