

HJM 2 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Rules

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Meeting Dates: 3/18

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Urges Congress to enact law to provide for treatment of veterans who participated in the cleanup of Enewetak Atoll as radiation-exposed veterans for purposes of the presumption of service-connection of certain disabilities by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Changes start date for individual participation in cleanup and decontamination efforts to 1962.

BACKGROUND:

Between 1946 and 1958, the United States conducted 67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands. The U.S. conducted 23 of these tests at Bikini Atoll, and 44 near Enewetak Atoll, but fallout spread throughout the Marshall Islands. Approximately 6,000 servicemembers assisted in the cleanup operation, which deposited an estimated 85,000 cubic meters of contaminated soil, concrete, and military equipment in "Cactus Crater" on Runit Island.

Currently, the federal government does not recognize servicemembers who cleaned up Enewetak Atoll as "atomic veterans," meaning they are not eligible to receive radiation exposure compensation from the federal Veterans Administration. A version of the Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act, which would designate the servicemembers who cleaned up Enewetak Atoll as "atomic veterans," has been introduced in Congress every year since 2014, but has yet to be enacted.

House Joint Memorial 2 urges Congress to act on behalf of servicemembers who were exposed to radiation during cleanup of the Enewetak Atoll.