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## American Legion National Commander calls for passage of Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act

WASHINGTON (April 18, 2016) – The head of the nation’s largest veterans service organization welcomed a bill introduced in the Senate last week that would provide benefits to veterans exposed to radioactive fallout while serving in the Marshall Islands.

“The American Legion Magazine recently reported on the enormous health toll environmental exposure has had on clean-up workers who served at Enewetak Atoll and other areas that conducted nuclear testing,” said American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett. “Many of the workers, particularly those involved in operations conducted after the actual testing, are routinely denied benefits. Plutonium has a half-life of 24,000 years. The fact that testing ended in the 1960s is irrelevant to those who had to clean up the waste in the following decades. The cancer rate among these veterans far exceeds those in similar age groups. Delegates at our 2014 National Convention in Charlotte unanimously passed a resolution calling for VA to examine and treat veterans exposed to environmental hazards. As one veteran said, ‘invisible bullets entered our bodies.’”

Barnett commended Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn.; Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., and Rep. Mark Takai, D-Hawaii, for introducing the Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act, which provides for the treatment and service-connection presumption of certain disabilities that could be related to service in the cleanup operations.

“Many of these veterans waited long enough to receive the benefits that they deserve,” Barnett said. “Unfortunately, some have died while waiting. I urge our members and other concerned Americans to contact their congressional delegations and ask that they pass this bipartisan legislation and put an end to this wait.”

With a current membership of 2.2 million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through nearly 14,000 posts across the nation.

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