

May 26, 2021

**Congresswoman Grace Meng (NY-06)
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Member Day Hearing**

Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost, and distinguished members of this committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak about my bill, H.R. 1585 – the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act.

Mr. Chairman, this is a bill that is especially personal to me, as it was named after our dear, late friend, Representative Mark Takai – who previously carried this bill. H.R. 1585 would permit veterans who participated in the nuclear cleanup of Enewetak Atoll to be treated as “radiation-exposed veterans.” Specifically, my bill would allow servicemembers who performed the largest nuclear cleanup ever undertaken to receive the medical care they now need for service-connected cancers and diseases, and receive service-connected compensation benefits. Current law only covers servicemembers who participated in active nuclear tests, not those who participated in the cleanup. This is simply wrong.

Roughly 4,000 troops helped clean up the Enewetak Atoll between 1977 and 1980. Most did not even wear shirts, let alone respirators. These Enewetak Atoll cleanup veterans, many of whom faced a long list of cancers and other deadly illnesses, are mostly gone today. Groups that track them estimate there are only about 400 of these veterans left. These survivors, who are now in their late 50s and 60s, have cancer and are fighting for their lives. My hope is that Congress will finally right this wrong, and help these individuals who sacrificed their youth and health in service of this great nation.

I am grateful for the strong bipartisan support of my legislation. I am especially thankful to you, Mr. Chairman, for your support of this bill – and I urge this committee for full consideration of my measure.

Once again, thank you Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Bost for your leadership in upholding our nation’s moral duty and promise to strengthen the health and safety of American veterans and their families.