



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Republicans | Ranking Member Phil Roe, M.D.

H.R. 1628: Enewetak Atoll Cleanup Radiation Study Act

Background:

The Enewetak Atoll was the site of 43 nuclear tests between 1946 and 1958. According to the Department of Defense (DoD). About 6,000 servicemembers participated in the Enewetak Cleanup Project (ECUP) from 1977 to 1980. The purpose of the ECUP was to remove irradiated soil and debris so that the U.S. could return the islands to its residents.

In a 2018 report by DoD, it was concluded that veterans who took part in the ECUP were not exposed to harmful levels of radiation. As a result, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not extend the presumption of exposure to ionizing radiation to ECUP veterans.

Veterans have raised concerns to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs that DoD's conclusion on the levels of exposure to radiation are inaccurate. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAS) also stated to the Committee that DoD's methodology in their 2018 report may have been outdated, and thus their conclusion may be flawed.

H.R. 1628 would require VA to partner with NAS and conduct a small-scale prospective study to determine the accuracy and adequacy of DoD's study, as well as whether a new Radiation Dose Assessment (RDA) would be possible and would improve the estimates for ECUP veterans. If a new RDA is warranted, NAS would identify the data sources, methodology, cost, and timeline for the new RDA. Moreover, the Secretary of VA would be required to provide, within 90 days of receiving the study, his plan of action in response to the study's results.

The Message:

- This legislation would ensure that further studies occur in order to understand the amount of radiation ECUP veterans were exposed to.
- The bill would answer questions about the accuracy of DoD's 2018 study.
- ECUP veterans deserve to know the truth about how much radiation they were exposed to and receive their earned disability benefits.
- H.R.1628 would, if warranted, have insignificant discretionary costs.