

AtomicCleanupVets.com

President Biden signs Queens lawmaker's bill into law to provide health care benefits for veterans exposed to radiation

[Carlotta Mohamed](#)

Posted on [August 12, 2022](#)

Posted by [QMS.com](#)



REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque

“[U.S Rep. Grace Meng’s](#) bill to provide health care benefits for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances cleaning up nuclear testing sites during the late 1970s was signed into law by President Biden on Wednesday, Aug. 10.

<https://qns.com/2022/08/biden-signs-quees-bill-to-provide-vet-healthcare>

AtomicCleanupVets.com

Biden signed the [Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act \(Honoring Our PACT Act\)](#), a key veterans health bill that includes Meng's legislation to provide health care benefits for "Atomic Veterans."

Meng's bill, the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act, will allow veterans who participated in the cleanup of Enewetak Atoll on the Marshall Islands to receive the same treatments and service-related disability presumptions that other "radiation-exposed veterans" receive.

From 1946 to 1958, the U.S. military conducted nuclear tests on the islands, but the thousands of service members who cleaned up the area were never eligible to receive health benefits. The current law has only covered those who participated in active nuclear tests, not those who participated in the cleanup.

The congresswoman's measure is named after the late Hawaii Congressman Mark Takai, a veteran of the U.S. Army and Hawaii Army National Guard who passed away in 2016, and was the original sponsor of the bill in the House of Representatives. Meng first introduced the bill in 2017.

Meng thanked Biden for making the bill the "law of the land" and also expressed gratitude to all of the Queens veterans who raised the issue of burn pits with her over the years and keeping up the fight.

"The enactment of my legislation will finally provide the brave veterans who cleaned up Enewetak Atoll with the health care they need and deserve," Meng said. "It is way overdue and should not have taken decades to correct this injustice. We must take care of all our nation's veterans, and that includes all who have cleaned-up nuclear testing sites and those exposed to hazardous materials."

AtomicCleanupVets.com

“As I’ve said, we have a moral obligation to ensure needed care is delivered to our toxic-exposed veterans, and the Honoring our PACT Act will make sure that impacted veterans receive the assistance they require,” Meng said.

The Honoring Our PACT Act is a sweeping bill that Meng helped pass in the House which expands healthcare to approximately 3.5 million veterans who were exposed to toxic substances during their service, including smoke from burn pits and other airborne hazards. It creates presumptions for 23 respiratory illnesses and cancers, such that they are assumed to have been caused by toxic substances. It is an issue that many Queens veterans have advocated for with Meng ever since she was first sworn into Congress.

Ryan Graham, of the Legislative Committee of the Queens County Council VFW, applauded the signing of the Honoring our PACT Act.

“Assisting those that participated in nuclear cleanup and radiation exposure, as well as those exposed to burn pits during the most recent conflicts during the Global War on Terror, is not only sensible but the responsibility we hold for those that served,” Graham said. “While taking care of those currently serving is of great importance, equally providing Veterans the VA services and compensation for service-related issues is just as important.”

Joe Bello, chair of the Metropolitan NYC Veterans Community Engagement Board, expressed his appreciation to Meng, their congressional leaders and all of the veteran service organizations and advocates who worked hard to see the legislation signed into law.

“I’m especially grateful for all of Congresswoman Meng’s work on the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act, which she has advocated on for many years. Her bill’s inclusion into the Honoring our PACT Act will make sure that veterans who worked

AtomicCleanupVets.com

on toxic exposure cleanups on the Marshall Islands have not been forgotten; and will give them and their families the benefits and services they are so rightly entitled to,” Bello said.”

Comments from Girard Frank Bolton, III. – Administrator of AtomicCleanupVets.com

Participants of the 1977-1980 Enewetak Atoll Atomic Cleanup Mission started reconnecting in 2012.

In 2015, #AtomicCleanupMission members started encouraging Federal Legislators to update military laws to change our radiation status from “occupational exposure” to “radiation risk exposure” so the Veterans Administration could accept healthcare claims from servicemen who participated in the Joint Task Group Mission.

It took us about seven years to accomplish our mission.

8,033 individuals participated in the three year mission. As of 2022, we have reconnected with about 900 of our mission participants. Over 50% of our known survivors claim to have health challenges due to radiation exposure from our mission at Enewetak Atoll in the Marshall Islands. We have verified the names of over 50 participants who have died since we started reconnecting in 2012. Almost 10 have died in 2022 alone. Most of them died of cancer.

We want to thank mission group members, our families, mission supporters, news agencies, federal legislators and many others who have made our mission a success!

In addition to the radiation exposure portion of the bill, military personnel who were exposed to other toxins while performing military service duties are entitled to VA healthcare assistance as well.

- Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act of 2022
- Palomares or Thule Veterans Act of 2022
- Veterans Agent Orange Exposure Equity Act of 2022
- Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2022
- Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act of 2022

For more information, go to “Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 or the Honoring our PACT Act of 2022” at

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3967>

To find an accredited American Legion service officer in your area,
visit www.legion.org/serviceofficers.

For more information on filing a VA disability claim, visit <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>

For more information on the PACT Act, visit <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/#vietnam-era-veteran-eligibilit>

<https://qns.com/2022/08/biden-signs-quees-bill-to-provide-vet-healthcare>