

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY AND HOMELAND
SECURITY

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Don Myers at 1:30 P.M. on March 5, 2007 in Room 241-N of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Representative Bob Bethell- excused
Representative Pat Colloton- excused
Representative Dick Kelsey- excused
Representative Kenny Wilk- excused

Committee staff present:

Art Griggs, Revisor of Statutes Office
Athena Andaya, Kansas Legislative Research
Betty Caruthers, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Representative Trimmer
Lawrence Halloran
George Webb, Director of Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs

Others attending:

See attached list.

Chairman Myers opened hearings on **HCR 5018 - Special U.S. Atomic Service Medal to honor Atomic Veterans.**

Chairman Myers recognized Representative Trimmer who testified as a proponent on the bill. (Attachment 1) He reported there are approximately 80 to 85 known surviving atomic veterans, including spouses, in Kansas and he would like to see them awarded and honored with this medal.

Chairman Myers recognized Lawrence Halloran who gave testimony as a proponent on the bill. (Attachment 2) He shared some personal stories of those he'd like to see honored for their courage, strength and devotion.

Chairman Myers recognized George Webb who also testified as a proponent on the bill. (Attachment 3) He would like to see the Atomic Veterans gain Federal recognition and be acknowledged for their contributions.

Chairman Myers closed hearings on **HCR 5018.**

Chairman Myers announced to the Committee that he would like to take a vote as to the possibility of working **HCR 5018** during the present meeting.

Representative Ruff moved to work HCR 5018 at that point. Representative Spalding seconded.

Motion carried.

Moved by Representative Ruff, seconded by Representative Crow to pass HCR 5018 favorably out of Committee.

Motion carried.

Chairman Myers adjourned the meeting at 2:00.

State of Kansas
House of Representatives

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Testimony to the House Committee on Veterans, Military and Homeland Security
in Support of House Concurrent Resolution 5018
By Representative Ed Trimmer

In 1945 the United States began a program of above ground nuclear testing that continued until 1963. During that time approximately 225,000 American personnel from every branch of the service were test site participants and as a result, test subjects. Because of their sacrifice, scientists and policy makers have a substantially, greater knowledge of the effects of ionizing radiation.

Not until 1988 did our government acknowledge that these persons had been constantly exposed to Alfa, Beta, and Gamma radiation and begin to authorize treatment for related health effects. These individuals were sworn to secrecy until 1996. Had they spoken of the events in which they participated they could have received up to twenty-years in federal prison. Because of the classified nature of the tests, these individuals were not given any form of recognition for the dangers they encountered, nor could they seek any recognition.

Today most atomic veterans are no longer with us. Of the original 225,000 only about 23,000 survive. A significantly higher than average number of these individuals have had their lives cut short by or are living with the ravaging effects of numerous forms of radiation induced cancer. They have been fighting a war with an unseen enemy for years and many of them have already lost. George W. Bush in a nationwide statement noted that these individual's exposure to ionizing radiation was as grave as anything suffered by veterans wounded in combat.

The resolution before you is not asking for monetary compensation for these individuals. Kansas is not being asked to strike any kind of medal. The resolution simply states that The Legislature of the State of Kansas urges the Congress of the United States, The President of the United States, and the United States Department of Defense strike a "Special Service Medal" honoring the Atomic Veterans who risked their lives in service to their country.

Medals have even been given to servicemen and women who have served in Antarctica because of the danger of the environment in which they serve. The atomic veterans are not envious of such awards. They would simply like to be recognized for the contribution they made to our country as well. Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand have already presented their atomic veterans with a medal honoring their sacrifice. Should our veterans receive any less?

House Committee on Veterans, Military
and Homeland Security
3/5/07
Attachment 1

March 4, 2007

The Honorable Don Myers
Chairman Committee on Veterans Affairs
Kansas State House of Representatives
Topeka, KS

Subj: Testimony; Lawrence M. Halloran, Mulvane, KS on behalf of Resolution 5018

Dear Chairman Myers,

I would like to thank you and the members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs for your time and consideration of Resolution 5018 requesting our national leadership and the President of the United States to honor the service and sacrifice of our nations Atomic Test Veterans. Veterans of unrestricted atmospheric and underwater atomic testing conducted from 1945 to 1963. While it has been over 60 years since the birth of the Atomic Bomb and over 43 years since the last test, individual participation and contributions remain unrecognized.

In 2002, President George W. Bush did proclaim July 16, 2002 as Atomic Veterans Day however, we find it hard to remember the fan fair leading up to that announcement and perhaps only a handful of atomic veterans and citizens are unaware of it.

In 2004, the first significant recognition of the atomic veteran occurred here in Kansas when our Legislators passed a resolution marking July 16, 2004 as Atomic Veterans Day in Kansas and Governor Kathleen Sebelius issued a personalized Certificate of Recognition to each known atomic veteran residing in Kansas. Two other states have since followed the courageous example set by Kansas.

Over the decades, The National Association of Atomic Veterans (NAAV) has been the primary sponsor of legislation related to the atomic veterans. We felt that somehow our elected officials viewed their efforts as SELF-SEEKING, in addition to expensive and a host of other possible reasons. NAAV (bound by National Security restraints until 1996) it would appear has tried diligently to work within the constraints of government with little or no public support to achieve their objectives. I think we can all appreciate the difficulty of such an effort.

Today, many citizens from across the State of Kansas have joined in a public petition of our government, **generated from outside of the atomic community**, to afford every veteran of atomic testing the lasting national recognition they so richly deserve. **The purpose of this effort is not to detract from the value or importance of any veteran's service nor elevate Atomic Veterans on a pedestal but rather to insure through recognition that they are included as a prominently visible part of our national and military history.** We are indeed hopeful that this body and our Governor will again set the standard for our nation and take a leading role in obtaining national recognition for the atomic veteran.

We wish to make it clear that we seek no apologies or justification of the testing performed or for the use of our military personnel in the performance of the testing. However, we realize that significant opposition exists in some government circles to establish a medal for a specific group of veterans. We hope to demonstrate and justify our request to set these particular veterans apart from all others, as we believe the circumstances of their service are significant, compelling and beyond the norm expected for peacetime operations. We value the service of every veteran who has stepped forward to serve and defend our nation. We have yet to find a

single veteran from any service period or category who cannot support our request or who would feel slighted by the recognition afforded the atomic veteran.

Members of the Armed Forces of the United States understand and appreciate the importance of service awards. These awards can recognize personal achievement, service at remote locations, participation in significant events and service under arduous, dangerous and difficult situations. Above all, service awards are a means of expressing the Nations gratitude for the member's service and readily identify the individual as one worthy of our respect, admiration and appreciation. Service awards are a lasting legacy passed on to the generations that inspire service and remind us of the true cost of our freedoms.

One would only need to consider the experience of a nineteen-year old seaman, selected with six others from the ships crew and stationed on the open deck during several successive tests in order to understand and appreciate the character and dedication to duty of all who participated. With youthful anticipation, the small group stood on the open deck as directed in the sweltering tropical climate, covered head to toe in successive layers of fowl smelling oil and carbon impregnated clothing and other presumably protective gear as they awaited the uncertainty and unknown outcome of the event they were about to experience. Isolated from the ships crew, battened down below decks, they stood fast in the face of the unknown despite their personal jitters and fears in the highest traditions of the United States Navy. In the wake of the first test, youthful anticipation was replaced with the knowledge that they truly stood in harms way and were witness to a power previously unfathomable. Believing their job was complete, they were informed that additional tests would be conducted. They unsuited and suited again for several more tests and were quarantined on deck for the better part of several days with only brief respite once a day for personal functions and to eat until the completion of the successive tests. Burdened with the increasing knowledge of what they faced they completed their assigned task to the weather deck recovery detail to collect debris from the detonations. They would experience bleeding from the nostrils, considerable chest pain and difficulty breathing from the pressure of the detonations and coagulation of blood in their nostrils and throats. Their vision would be painful and temporarily obstructed from the intensity of the detonation, even thru tightly closed eyes and protective gear such that, for a period of time, when it was possible to open their eyes, they could only see trace outlines but not the mass of the structure surrounding them.

This 19-year-old Seaman would complete his active duty but would return to the service of his country when years later there was a call for experienced personnel. He would continue that service and retire as a Chief Petty Officer from the United States Naval Reserve. Chairman Meyers and members of the committee, I know this Chief as do you, Mr. Gary S. Thornton Sr. of Leon, Kansas and I am personally proud to have served with him for the final three years of his career. I know him to be an honorable man of the highest integrity whose word I accept without reservation or doubt. Although retired, he continues to serve his shipmates, fellow service members, widows and spouses at every opportunity

For many of the participants, it would be years before the debilitating after effects of their exposure in the form of cancers would commence their deadly march through their lives. For others, blessed with continued good health, there will always be a lingering question of future problems yet known. In a very real way, every single participant is still serving; quietly with grace and dignity and without the simplest form of recognition.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, it is the raw courage, strength and devotion to duty of my shipmate and all who participated in these test that we wish to see recognized. They deserve our respect, admiration and appreciation. They deserve nothing less

than an Atomic Test Service Medal in their honor, available for issue to them or surviving spouses upon request.

We appreciate the efforts that each of you and our Congressional leaders are making on behalf of the atomic veteran. We hope you will find merit in our request to honor the atomic veteran.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence M. Halloran". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a horizontal line at the end.

Lawrence M. Halloran
Senior Chief, USNR Ret.
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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF THE ATOMIC VETERANS

March 5th, 2005

George Webb

Executive Director, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs

It is with strong support that I come before you in recognizing the effort to present a proclamation acknowledging the service of the veterans exposed to atomic testing and the prospect of a federal service award.

In 2004, Mr. Gary Thornton made me aware of the history of the Atomic Veterans, and working together, we got the support of Governor Sebelius. The Governor was very quick to issue an individual letter to each Kansan, and we had a formal ceremony in which each known Kansan received that letter. The result was powerful, because each awarded veteran saw that what he did was known and appreciated.

Recently the Atomic Veterans' leadership in Kansas has sought to get the Department of Defense to issue a service award for all American veterans who participated in atomic testing. Unfortunately, General Pace, the Chairman of the Joints Chief of Staff, wrote back and explained that singling out one specific group would be detrimental, so the DoD was not in support of a service medal. However, I believe that this circumstance is completely unique in that test participants were sworn to secrecy for many years, and thus they did not have the wherewithal to get national acknowledgement for their contributions and, sadly, their exposure.

I have met with these fine Kansas leaders, and I am confident that their motivation is not to solicit medical or fiscal benefits. Rather, they simply want the Nation to acknowledge their contributions – contributions which for so long had to be hidden under a cloak of secrecy.

We do not know if a proclamation from Kansas will be the catalyst that gets the Nation moving on a service medal, but it cannot hurt. Certainly the Kansas study not long ago jump-started the country on accepting Gulf War Illness as real. I have visited with the staffs of our congressional delegation in the House of Representatives, and I believe the support is there to get the Department of Defense to consider a service medal that would say, "Thank you, and you made a difference for America."

Therefore, I stand with the Atomic Veterans of Kansas and across this country in their endeavor to gain federal recognition.



George S. Webb

Executive Director

Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs