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Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs  
Ways & Means  
Coal Technical Advisory Committee

# **Tim Schaffer**

## **State Senator, 20<sup>th</sup> Senate District**

### **Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee** **Senate Concurrent Resolution 5 — Sponsor Testimony** **Wednesday October 9, 2019**

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Hottinger, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the House Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Concurrent Resolution 5.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 5 addresses a critical issue that is affecting a very important group of people, the Atomic Veterans. More specifically, those Atomic Veterans who participated in the clean-up process of nuclear events. Because of the importance and secrecy, Atomic Veterans who participated in clean-up efforts have rare challenges, specifically with their healthcare and quality of life. It is time for the United States to recognize their contributions to our country and bring attention to their distinct situation.

During the period of 1972 to 1980, thousands of personnel were sent to the Marshall Islands to clean up previously active nuclear test sites. I have read several testimonies where many of these men and women would perform clean-up duties at or around a nuclear test site without any sort of protective gear. Some said the lack of equipment was due to inadequate funding, others said they were told they were safe to not wear any gear. Some just tied their shirts around their face, while others went to work in a tee shirt, shorts, sandals and no other protective safety gear.

Today these veterans have reports of cancer, birth defects in children, and other documented health effects from exposure to nuclear waste. Shockingly, many of these veterans do not receive the same benefits, which are given to other service members who were involved in active nuclear tests. In 1988, Congress passed the Radiation-Exposed Veterans Compensation Act; however, the veterans that did the cleanup without adequate safety gear were excluded. These Veterans have sacrificed so much for our country, and all the while, they were only doing their job. It is time that the United States stand up for these Veterans.

One such military veteran who dealt with the nuclear clean-up process, and for whom this act is named, was the late Hawaii Congressman Mark Takai (D). Congressman Takai served in the U.S. Army and Hawaii Army National Guard, and went on to represent the people of Hawaii in the United States House of Representatives. During his time in the House, Congressman Takai became the original sponsor of this important legislation. Unfortunately, his time on Earth was cut short due to cancer and he passed away at the young age of 49.

To address the many challenges this specific sub-group of the Atomic Veterans have faced in regards to health care and quality of life, Senate Concurrent Resolution 5, will urge Congress to enact the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act. This Act will address the inequity for these specific veterans in regards to their healthcare; more specifically, it will classify those veterans who participated in the cleanup of Eniwetok Atoll in the Marshall Islands as radiation-

exposed veterans. This clarification will provide many clean-up crew veterans with healthcare services and benefits that they are in desperate need to have.

Thank you once again, Chairman Hackett, and the members of the committee, for the opportunity to present this issue to you today. I will be glad to answer any questions at this time.