

Minority Views of Ranking Member Richard Burr

I offered the text of legislation I introduced, S. 1518, the Caring for Camp Lejeune Veterans Act of 2009, as an amendment to the Committee bill at the August 5, 2010, markup. The amendment, which would give veterans and family members exposed to contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune VA health care eligibility for conditions related to the exposure, was, regrettably, defeated on a party-line vote. At the Committee's January 28, 2010, markup I offered the same amendment, also defeated on a party-line vote, in favor of an approach advanced by my colleagues in the majority which put the onus of providing for sick Camp Lejeune family members on the Department of Defense (DoD). I argued then that the majority's approach would not advance because of a number of problems, and that the Committee's action gave false hope to sick veterans and family members. That bill has yet to advance in the Senate, and the Senate Armed Services Committee has signaled it has no intention of moving the majority's bill.

My colleagues in the majority continue to assert that DoD must first take responsibility for the contamination at Camp Lejeune, but this view ignores the fact that DoD continues to view this issue through the prism of litigation and has no incentive to address the plight of veterans and their families exposed to environmental hazards while working and living on a DoD installation. In the absence of DoD acceptance of responsibility or formal consideration for the veterans and their families, this Committee should recognize that VA is the logical and desirable provider of health care. Furthermore, I have argued that precedent exists in VA to care for veterans and dependents suffering from the effects of harmful exposures. No such precedent exists at DoD.

I remain committed to enacting legislation providing those affected by the Lejeune water contamination. They have waited long enough for the Congress to act. I will continue to be vocal about their plight until we finally have given them this small measure of recognition for what they have endured.