**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 53‑3‑250 SO AS TO DESIGNATE THE SIXTEENTH DAY OF JULY OF EACH YEAR AS “ATOMIC VETERANS DAY” IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

Whereas, throughout the history of this great State and nation, brave South Carolinians, answering the call of duty and service, have defended our freedoms as members of the United States armed forces; and

Whereas, more than two hundred thousand American service members, including South Carolinians, participated in aboveground nuclear tests between 1945 and 1962, served with the United States military occupation forces in or around Hiroshima and Nagasaki before 1946, or were held as prisoners of war in or near Hiroshima or Nagasaki; and

Whereas, with the aid of American service members, the United States conducted the Trinity nuclear test, the world’s first detonation of a nuclear device, in New Mexico on July 16, 1945, as a result of the Manhattan Project; and

Whereas, all these atomic veterans may have been exposed to radiation during their military service and, due to that exposure, may have developed cancer or other medical conditions; and

Whereas, many atomic veterans were prevented by secrecy laws or oaths from seeking medical care or disability compensation from the United States Department of Veterans’ Affairs (VA) for conditions they may have developed as a result of radiation exposure; and

Whereas, in 1996, the United States Congress repealed the Nuclear Radiation and Secrecy Agreements Act, thus freeing atomic veterans to describe their military involvement in nuclear testing in order to file for VA benefits; and

Whereas, atomic veterans may be eligible for free medical care from the VA and compensation in the form of a partial or full service‑connected disability allowance, including potential payments to a surviving spouse or children; and

Whereas,the National Association of Atomic Veterans was formed in 1979 to help atomic veterans obtain medical care and assistance; and

Whereas,it is altogether fitting and proper that atomic veterans be recognized for their service and sacrifice. Now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Chapter 3, Title 53 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 53‑3‑250. The sixteenth day of July of each year is designated as ‘Atomic Veterans Day’ in South Carolina.”

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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