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VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION **HEALTH-CARE**
PROGRAMS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1085

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON **VETERANS'** AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO ACCOMPANY

S. 876



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disability (or age), income, and net worth limitations; readjustment counselling; certain burial benefits; loan guaranty benefits in certain cases; and certain employment benefits.

Extension of Health-Care Eligibility Based on Exposure to Dioxin or Other Toxic Substances in Vietnam or to Nuclear Radiation

Section 202 of the Committee bill, which is derived from section 4 of S. 6, would extend until **September 30, 1989**, the provision in current law which provides certain veterans—those who exposed to dioxin or other toxic substances used in herbicides or defoliants in Vietnam or to ionizing radiation from nuclear detonations—with eligibility for priority health care from the VA for the treatment of most disabilities.

Background

Under current law, this authority, which was enacted in 1981 by Public Law 97-72, is scheduled to terminate 1 year after the Administrator submits the first report on the epidemiological study of Vietnam veterans mandated by Public Law 96-161. That report is to be submitted 24 months after the protocol for the study is approved, which occurred on February 14, 1985. Thus, this special, interim health-care eligibility is scheduled to expire on February 14, 1987.

Committee bill

The Committee is proposing to extend this authority because the major study designed to yield the necessary information—the epidemiological study of Vietnam veterans mandated in 1970 by Public Law 96-151 and authorized to be expanded by Public Law 97-72, which is being carried out by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and any scientific study of the health status of veterans exposed to radiation undertaken pursuant to Public Law 98-160 will not be sufficiently advanced by February 1987 to permit final decisions to be made at that time.

The CDC study—which is now underway—will involve 30,000 veterans, 10,000 of whom will undergo comprehensive 3-day medical examinations at a nongovernmental medical facility in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The scope of this investigation—the costs of a Selected Cancers Study will be \$75 million—is unprecedented among major epidemiological studies, especially inasmuch as it includes such a larger number of actual medical exams. However, no results regarding the health effects of exposure are expected prior to September 1988, the target date that CDC has set for reporting on the study. If that target date is met and this extension has been enacted, the Congress would have a year before the proposed new expiration date in which to evaluate the results of the CDC study and other pertinent information and make decisions on appropriate further action with regard to dioxin exposure.

The Committee intends to monitor closely the CDC study and other ongoing studies relating to dioxin exposure as well as studies and other activities relating to the health effects of exposure to radiation. It is the Committee's intention to reconsider the need for