



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### Navajo leadership and former uranium workers advocate to congressional leaders for the extension of RECA



**Photo:** Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty along with former Navajo uranium workers met with Sen. Tom Udall to seek support for the extension of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act on Tuesday, June 26, 2018 in Washington, D.C.

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – On Tuesday, a delegation from the Navajo Nation met with congressional leaders to advocate for the extension of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, or RECA, and to expand certain provisions that would include providing benefits to victims of nuclear fallout such as “downwinders” and former uranium mine workers. RECA was first enacted in 1990.

The scope of coverage was broadened in 2000, however the provisions did not include certain states, post 1971 miners, specific types of cancers, expansion of benefits, and downwinders who

experienced the poisonous fallout of nuclear weapons testing. The fallout affected water and food supplies, namely farms, farm animals, rivers, and lakes.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'í) and Vice President Jonathan Nez led the delegation of former Navajo uranium miners and families affected by open-pit uranium mining and uranium spills that occurred in their communities several years ago.

Delegate Crotty said it was important for the Navajo miners and families to meet with congressional leaders to advocate for the extension and expansion of provisions within RECA to include specific cancers, additional affected states, and benefits to family members who were also affected by uranium mining.

“The Navajo people continue to suffer from the impact of uranium. In order to try to make a living, Navajo uranium miners, millers, and core drillers worked day and night in those mines. Navajo families moved to mining camps and were directly impacted by uranium contamination. Unknowingly, families drank, bathed, and washed clothes with radioactive water resulting in high levels of uranium exposure,” said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty and the delegation met with U.S. Sen. Tom Udall (D – NM) and Sen. Mike Crapo (R –ID) and staff from the offices of Sen. Jeff Flake (R – AZ) and Mike Lee (R – UT), requesting their support for Senate Bill 197 entitled the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2017, which is sponsored by Sen. Crapo.

The proposed bill seeks to extend RECA for an additional 19 years, increase compensation for affected individuals, include affected areas in the states of Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and New Mexico, and expand eligibility requirements and benefits.

Delegate Crotty said the delegation advocated to congressional leadership to include affected family members who had regular contact with uranium miners, uranium spills, and the fallout from nuclear weapons testing.

“In addition to mining activities, Navajo downwinders also suffer from the effects of radiation fallout from nuclear weapons testing. The fallout contaminated the land, water and food supply in areas within the Navajo Nation. Just compensation, access to specialized healthcare providers, and comprehensive health studies are needed and imperative,” said Delegate Crotty.

The United States conducted nearly 200 atmospheric nuclear weapons development tests from 1945 to 1962, and uranium mining for the federal government continued on the Navajo Nation well into the 1980's. Nuclear weapons development included uranium mining and processing, which was carried out by tens of thousands of workers, and in 1962, many of these workers filed class action lawsuits alleging exposure to known radiation hazards.

Congress responded by devising a program allowing partial restitution to individuals who developed serious illnesses after exposure to radiation released during the atmospheric nuclear tests, or after employment in the uranium industry, through the enactment of RECA in 1990.



**Photo: Delegate Crotty and Vice President Nez along with former Navajo uranium workers attended a senate hearing regarding RECA on Wednesday, June 27, 2018 in Washington, D.C.**

During a hearing by the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary on Wednesday, Vice President Nez spoke on behalf of the delegation and provided testimony to the committee seeking support for S. 197.

Delegate Crotty extended her gratitude to the senate committee for allowing the stories of affected individuals to be heard by their nation's leaders. Also in attendance were former uranium workers Phillip Harrison, Jr., Tommy Reed, Harry Desiderio, Marie Kirlie and her daughter Lenora Garcia, and Leslie Begay.

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