



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyn Curley (928) 286-7918
nmb.communications@gmail.com

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee supports funding to aid former Navajo uranium mine workers

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee issued their support for Legislation No. 0431-17, which seeks the approval of approximately \$250,000 from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance for the Office of Navajo Uranium Workers.

According to the legislation, the funding would go toward retaining a specialized lobbying consultant to aid in securing Congressional passage of amendments to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, or RECA, which would increase aid to uranium mine workers and assure fair consideration of claims such as vicinity, property, groundwater exposure, and attorney fees.

HEHSC member and legislation sponsor Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'í'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé alnáóz't'í) said that field hearings were held in the communities of Shiprock, Tuba City, and Kayenta, regarding uranium cleanup and the need for federal accountability for uranium exposure that continues to impact many Navajo people.

“The legislation is critical because the RECA is set to expire in 2020, and we still have Navajo miners and families that are trying to meet the medical requirements, and sometimes that puts them at a disadvantage in having to travel and get these doctors to assess them,” said Delegate Crotty. “We want to reduce medical examinations from two-years to one-year to expedite the process for those affected.”

Delegate Crotty added that the Navajo Nation Birth Cohort Study has found trace elements of uranium in Navajo newborns. The legacy of uranium contamination continues, and the legislation seeks to provide a remedy for those affected through congressional action, said Delegate Crotty.

The proposed RECA amendments would extend the coverage for compensation to post-1971 uranium miners and millers, extend the list of compensable diseases and eligibilities, schedule additional field hearings, and expand coverage for families that are being affected by the aftermath of uranium mining and contamination.

According to information from the Navajo Nation Department of Health, the Office of Navajo Uranium Workers serves over 4,700 clients from one office location in the community of Shiprock.

In support of the legislation, HEHSC member Council Delegate Steven Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a') said that a portion of the communities he represents have been affected by uranium mining.

"A lot of employees and Navajo people experienced a lot of exposure in my area, as well as everywhere else. They didn't know what they were dealing with and they still don't know what they're dealing with. The amount of education we can provide to them is needed and investigations still need to happen. A lot of the people that live near the old mines, they left because of the contamination, and then there are people that are still there and they have to live with it every single day," said Delegate Begay.

Delegate Begay added that generations are cut short and said that Congress needs to understand that many have lived there for so long and may not have the means to move to another area, and that it is also affecting the land's ecosystem, water, wildlife, and livestock.

HEHSC members voted 4-0 to approve Legislation No. 0431-17, which now moves forward to the Budget and Finance Committee and the Naabik'iyáti' Committee for consideration. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the bill.

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