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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2021

President Nez provides testimony to Congress in support of the extension and expansion of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Wednesday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez provided testimony before the U.S. Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties, in support of Navajo people who continue to experience long-term health impacts due to radioactive contamination and exposure from abandoned uranium mines, during a hearing titled, “Examining the Need to Expand Eligibility Under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act.”

In his oral testimony, President Nez called for Congress to extend the Radiation and Exposure Compensation Program beyond 2022, to include all downwinders, to expand coverage to include post-1971 workers and families, to expand eligibility for coverage under the program to include additional categories of workers and types of cancers, and to increase the compensation cap to a minimum of \$200,000 per individual.

“I am here today to represent Navajo downwinders, uranium workers, and many other Navajo families and descendants who deserve fair compensation and healthcare for the risks they took and the sacrifices they made for this country,” said President Nez. “The disproportionate suffering of the Navajo people as a result of past uranium mining and processing on Navajo lands is well-documented and has been acknowledged by Congressional leaders of both parties. The tragic legacy of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation continues to this day, perhaps to an extent that would not have occurred if it weren’t taking place in a rural, American Indian community. However, now Congress has the opportunity to rectify at least some portion of this situation through amendments to RECA.”

Approximately 30 million tons of uranium ore was extracted from Navajo lands during mining operations from 1944 to 1986 to support America’s nuclear activities such as the U.S. Military’s Manhattan Project, World War II, and the Cold War. In July of 1979, the United States experienced a catastrophic spill of radioactive material when over 94 million gallons of radioactive waste and over 1,100 tons of uranium waste spilled into the Rio Puerco and through Navajo lands in the area of Church Rock, N.M.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act was first enacted in 1990 and was amended in 2000, but did not include provisions for certain states, post 1971 miners, certain types of cancers,

expansion of benefits, and downwinders. For many years, a group of former Navajo uranium miners known as the Navajo Uranium Radiation Victims Committee, has worked with members of the House and Senate, as well as leaders of the Navajo Nation, to pass a new bill that would include amendments to provide the necessary benefits.

On March 19, President Nez met with members of the Navajo Uranium Radiation Victims Committee to gain input for Wednesday's testimony. President Nez also acknowledged and thanked Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty and the 24th Navajo Nation Council for their support and advocacy for downwinders, former uranium mine workers, and their families.

"On behalf of the Navajo people, I thank Chairman Steve Cohen and Subcommittee members, Senator Ben Ray Luján, Rep. Greg Stanton, and all of the supporters and advocates who provided testimony today. We will continue to fight for coverage and compensation to help our people cope and heal from uranium contamination exposure through the extension and expansion of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act," added President Nez.

There are approximately 524 abandoned uranium mine sites on the Navajo Nation and the Navajo Nation EPA estimates that there could be far more. Unfortunately, only 219 of these sites have available funds for clean-up and remediation efforts, leaving a total of 305 un-addressed sites that pose severe environmental and health hazards to surrounding areas and people.

Although there is approximately \$1.7 billion to clean-up the 219 mine sites, it is not enough. The Navajo Nation estimates that it will cost an additional \$3.5 billion to address the remaining 305 sites, which does not include the cost of long-term monitoring and maintenance.

President Nez's full written testimony is available on the House Committee on the Judiciary website at: <https://judiciary.house.gov/>.

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