



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 22, 2021

President Nez offers support for the introduction of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2021

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer offered their support for the introduction of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2021, which was introduced in the U.S House and Senate on Wednesday.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act was first enacted in 1990 then amended in 2000, and is set to expire in 2022. The amendments introduced on Wednesday would extend the Act until 2040, expand downwinder eligibility based on geographic residency and expand the range of years that can be used for calculating exposure for certain individuals working in uranium mines, mills, or transporting uranium ore.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer thanked U.S. Sen. Ben Ray Luján (D-NM), Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID), and Representative Teresa Leger Fernández (D-NM) for championing the bill and supporting the Navajo Nation’s efforts to extend and expand benefits. They also acknowledged and thanked the Navajo Uranium Radiation Victims Committee for their longstanding advocacy and support.

“The RECA Amendments of 2021 presents an opportunity for Congress to work with the Navajo Nation, the Navajo Uranium Radiation Victims Committee, and other impacted groups to appropriately extend RECA's coverage. Now is the time to ensure that this program reaches its full potential in remediating effects of radiation exposure on the Navajo people. The extension of the Radiation and Exposure Compensation Program beyond 2022 and the inclusion of post-1971 uranium workers are two changes that we strongly support. We strongly support this bill, but also urge Congress to go further to include all downwinders, to expand eligibility for coverage under the program to include additional categories of uranium workers and types of cancers and other radiation-related illnesses, and to increase the compensation cap to a minimum of \$200,000 per individual regardless of worker classification or category of disease,” said President Nez.

In March, President Nez also 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. He also met with members of the Navajo Uranium Radiation Victims Committee to gain input and support for the testimony.

“We look forward to working with Congress to ensure that all individuals who worked around the mines and who are downwinders are covered fairly under the proposed RECA amendments. Justice demands swift action in addressing the urgent needs of the Navajo Nation and our impacted members and communities. We stand ready to work together with Congress on the RECA Amendments of 2021 to address our concerns,” stated Vice President Lizer.

President Nez also met with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael S. Regan and Congressman Tom O’Halloran (D-AZ) last Thursday, as they visited an abandoned uranium mine site in Cameron, Ariz., located on the Navajo Nation. President Nez and Navajo Nation EPA Executive Director Valinda Shirley advocated for immediate remediation, proper consultation, increased funding for abandoned mine clean-up efforts and provided context for the need to extend the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act.

Senator Luján stated, “Former uranium miners who are sick and dying and downwind communities whose air and water was poisoned deserve to be treated fairly by their government. While there can never be a price placed on one’s health or the life of a loved one, Congress has an opportunity to do right by all of those who sacrificed in service of our national security by strengthening RECA. For over a decade, I’ve been fighting alongside impacted communities to extend and expand RECA. This is about justice and doing what’s right, and there’s no time to waste.”

“New Mexicans have endured the harmful effects of nuclear testing and uranium mining for decades,” said Representative Leger Fernández. “These aren’t abstract issues for New Mexicans. Our communities, especially communities of color, suffered when we tested nuclear weapons and mined uranium for those bombs on our lands. Our government must right this wrong. We must compensate those who are battling cancer, leukemia and other diseases caused by radiation exposure. This bill does just that. We cannot continue to ignore these injustices. This bill will ensure that those harmed continue to receive compensation and expand the current law to cover communities that have been left behind to deal with the repercussions on their own. It’s time that they receive fair compensation.”

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. The Nez-Lizer Administration will continue to seek federal support and resources to address the long-term clean-up of uranium sites on the Navajo Nation.

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