



24th Navajo Nation Council hears concerns from former Navajo uranium workers and victims at RECA forum

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FARMINGTON, N.M. — On Friday, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council attended the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) Amendments of 2021 Public Forum hosted by The Navajo Nation Washington Office (NNWO) which aimed to promote dialogue between Navajo Nation individuals impacted from radiation exposure and federal and tribal leaders.

“Although the years of unsafe mining are behind us, the devastating legacy it has left behind still impacts our people, families, and communities to this day,” said Speaker Damon. “The federal Government must remember its obligation to the countless former uranium miners, downwinders, and the families suffering from the devastating health complications uranium exposure brings.”

Among those in attendance were Hon. Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’ahnáoozt’í’í, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gad’ii’áhi/Tó Ko’í), Hon. Council Delegate Paul Begay (Coppermine, K’ai’bii’tó, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake, Bodaway/Gap), Hon. Council Delegate Eugenia Charles Newton (Shiprock), Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, and Navajo Nation Washington Office Executive Director Lashawna Tso.

At the forum members of the Navajo Uranium Radiation Victims Committee were able to directly listen to congressional leaders provide updates on the state of the bill. Attending delegates each spoke on behalf of their constituents they represent and the extensive impacts uranium radiation exposure has had.

Under the expansion of the program, congressional leaders spoke on the list of added amendments which included extending compensation to different workers, extending the RECA Trust Fund for an additional 19 years, adding additional diseases for workers, and increasing compensation for atmospheric testing claimants including Downwinders.

Additional public comments were made from attending citizens who spoke about the detrimental impacts uranium mining and exposure has caused to themselves, their families, and communities. Stories about the resulting health complications were shared in which it was highlighted that this is a common occurrence for families across the Navajo Nation.

“Out of the few stories shared today, there are hundreds more that are never heard, so it is crucial as leaders to advocate for those who cannot,” said Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty. “The United States is deeply indebted to the brave men and women who without knowledge, were exposed to harmful amounts of uranium radiation.”

In 1990, Congress passed RECA which allowed for the creation of a program to provide compensation to individuals who developed specific diseases from radiation exposure during the years of federal mining activities from 1942 to 1971.

Originally, the RECA program was scheduled to end in July, yet in the same month, Congress passed a two-year extension of the RECA program for two years, allowing individuals more time to apply for compensation. This short-term extension allows lawmakers time to seek a long-term solution that would extend RECA into 2040 along with expanding the program.

The 24th Navajo Nation Council and the Office of the President & Vice President will continue their efforts in lobbying for the 2040 extension while prioritizing the health and wellbeing of those impacted.

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