



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Voices Strong Support for S.3853, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act



Council Delegate Danny Simpson sponsored an emergency legislation supporting the reauthorization of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – In an emergency special session the 25th Navajo Nation Council unanimously passed Legislation 0119-24 supporting U.S. Senate Bill 3853 – the Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act which would expand and extend the current Act to benefit more Navajo individuals who were impacted by uranium mining.

This action was taken in response to Speaker Mike Johnson, of the U.S. House of Representatives, scheduling a vote for H.R. 8097 – the RECA Extension Act of 2024, a bill that merely extends the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) by two years without expanding its beneficiaries. Speaker Johnson withdrew the vote the following day, May 29, 2024, but his prioritization of H.R. 8097 has prompted the Navajo Nation’s decisive response.

“We need decisive action by our leaders in the House. For too long, the federal government has ignored the devastating impact of its actions on our people. By supporting S. 3853, we honor the memory of those who suffered and ensure that future generations are not forgotten,” 25th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalline Curley said while thanking her Council colleagues for their strong support.

The Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CJN-30-24 thoroughly reviews the history of RECA, signed into law on October 15, 1990. The original RECA provided one-time compensation to individuals impacted by America's uranium industry and nuclear development program, including those residing or working in certain counties downwind of the Nevada Test Site, workers involved in atmospheric nuclear weapons tests, and uranium miners, millers, and ore transporters employed before 1971.

Despite RECA's initial progress, it left hundreds, if not thousands, of victims unrecognized and uncompensated. The Navajo Nation has relentlessly advocated for these forgotten individuals, particularly those exposed to radiation after 1971 and those affected by downwind radiation from the Trinity Test Site in New Mexico, a site unjustly excluded from RECA coverage.

Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren stated, "The legacy of uranium mining on Navajo land is one of sickness, suffering, and environmental devastation. Our people were unknowingly exposed to deadly radiation that still affects our communities today. S.3853 is a crucial step towards justice for the Navajo Nation and all victims of this dark legacy."

The Council's resolution emphasizes the necessity of extending RECA, highlighting that radiation illnesses often take years to manifest. It also points out that uranium mining continued through the 1980s, warranting compensation for those exposed during this period. Furthermore, the resolution underscores that S. 3853 addresses the historical damage caused by uranium mining and downwind exposure in Navajo communities more comprehensively than any current RECA-related bill in the House.

The Navajo Nation has been a steadfast advocate for S.3853 since Senator Hawley introduced it on February 29, 2024. This bill is seen as holding the federal government accountable for the harm inflicted on unsuspecting American citizens who trusted their government to protect them during World War II, the post-war era, and into the Cold War. While Congress acknowledged and apologized for the harm through the original RECA, many victims fell through the gaps.

S.3853 extends RECA for six years, compared to the two-year extension proposed by H.R. 8097. It also expands the number of illnesses covered and broadens the beneficiary pool to include those affected by uranium mining or living downwind from testing sites, left out from the original coverage.

The Navajo Nation deems H.R. 8097 an injustice to the countless Americans suffering from radiation-related illnesses due to extensive nuclear weapons production in the mid to late twentieth century. The Navajo Nation Washington Office will continue to advance these discussions and push Congress to support S. 3853.

S. 3853 passed the Senate with a 69-30 vote, enjoying bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress. President Biden has committed to signing it into law if it reaches his desk. The widespread support for RECA begs the question: what is stopping Speaker Mike Johnson from doing the same?

The 25th Navajo Nation Council approved Legislation No. 0119-24, sponsored by Council Delegate Danny Simpson, by a vote of 22-0.

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