

Legislation removes uranium worker benefits

Written by Staff Reports

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WASHINGTON D.C. — Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren and Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley expressed disappointment that amendments to benefit former Navajo uranium workers and their families were removed from pending federal legislation.

They released a statement showcasing their disappointment Dec. 8:

“On behalf of the Navajo Nation, we express our disappointment in the removal of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments from the National Defense Authorization Act,” they said. “This decision is disheartening to the Navajo Nation – a people whose significant contributions helped build America’s nuclear arsenal, secured a victory in World War II, and boosted energy development.”

The RECA amendments were meant to provide relief for horrific health consequences suffered by former Navajo uranium miners and their families.

“By stripping these amendments from the National Defense Authorization Act, the government sends a deplorable message: that the sacrifices of the Navajo Nation do not matter,” the Navajo leaders wrote. “This is unacceptable.”

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Nygren and Curley stated that the Navajo people have endured inordinate suffering, disease and cancers through radiation exposure from the mid-to-late 20th century.

Uranium mining began on the Navajo Nation in 1944 to support the federally-led Manhattan Project.

Following World War II, uranium mining on Navajo lands increased through the Atomic Energy Commission because of the Cold War.

In 1990, Congress enacted the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act. The law provided one-time compensation to uranium workers and downwinders for covered diseases pre-1971.

The current program is limited to those who were exposed during the period of Jan. 1, 1942, to Dec. 31, 1971.

RECA was administered by the Department of Justice and awarded more than \$2.4 billion in benefits to more than 37,000 claimants.

The compensation program is set to expire in June.. Expansion of the program is needed to advance justice for additional individuals who were adversely impacted but are not currently eligible for benefits under the existing RECA regulations.

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