



## Navajo Nation's Fight for Reauthorization of Uranium Mining Compensation



Photo Source: NNWO

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Following Thursday's meeting with NASA Administrator Bill Nelson, Navajo Nation Speaker Crystalyne Curley met with Senator Josh Hawley (R-Missouri) to discuss the reauthorization of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), emphasizing the urgent need to pass funding for RECA as the program faces a June 2024 deadline for reauthorization. Subsequently, Speaker Curley participated in a press conference with Senator Hawley to draw national attention to the critical need for reauthorization.

Concluding the press conference, Senator Hawley introduced amendments to the Senate's supplemental foreign aid package, seeking to broaden compensation for individuals exposed to uranium radiation. While Senators Hawley and Ben Ray Lujan (D-New Mexico) successfully included a similar amendment in last year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). A bipartisan bicameral conference committee—established to reconcile both NDAA bills from the House and Senate—removed the amendment in the final legislation. Speaker Curley emphasized in a press release, "For decades, our leaders, former uranium workers, and countless others have pleaded for justice on Capitol Hill. Congress must take decisive action to provide and enhance compensation and support for Navajo victims whose sacrifices in the uranium mines were instrumental in the United States' Cold War victory."

Uranium mining on the Navajo Nation has resulted in severe health issues, environmental degradation, and economic disparities. Many Navajo people suffer from illnesses due to exposure to radioactive materials, while water sources remain contaminated. Disrupting cultural and social

ties to ancestral lands further compounds these challenges. While cleanup initiatives and advocacy efforts are underway, the obstacles to fully mitigate the impacts of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation persist. As the Navajo Nation continues to contribute to America's global platform, the country must reconcile and take essential steps toward justice for families reeling from its adverse effects.

It is also imperative to consider the historical context of the Navajo Nation's relationship with the United States government, marked by a complex interplay of treaties, land rights, and policies that have shaped the current landscape. Over the decades, uranium mining has left a devastating imprint on Navajo lands, with far-reaching environmental and health consequences for communities residing in affected areas. The prevalence of health ailments linked to uranium exposure underscores the urgent need for comprehensive remediation efforts and healthcare support within Navajo communities. Despite these challenges, Navajo resilience shines through in various community-led initiatives to preserve cultural heritage, promote sustainable development, and address pressing environmental concerns.

The Navajo Nation Washington Office remains actively engaged in advocacy meetings with congressional members to underscore the significance of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act and its pivotal role for Navajo families grappling with the enduring consequences of uranium mining near their homes. Last month, Executive Director Justin Ahasteen met with former miners and advocates – Marie Kirley, Leslie Begay, Lenora Garcia, and Phil Harrison – urging the reauthorization of RECA.

As the Navajo Nation Washington Office charts a path forward, it remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding its people, lands, and cultural heritage while seeking justice and redress for continued injustices inflicted by uranium mining and other inequities. The Navajo Nation Washington Office will provide updates as they become available.