



Remembering “Downwinders” – Victims of Radiation Poisoning by the American Government



Mushroom cloud from a nuclear test at the Nevada Test Site visible in downtown Las Vegas, NV (NNSA Photo)

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Monday, President Nygren issued a proclamation designating January 27, 2025, as “A Day of Remembrance for American Downwinders and Navajo Uranium Miners.” This hallowed day recognizes those who were unknowingly exposed to radioactive fallout and uranium contamination.

The Navajo Nation played a critical role in the U.S. nuclear program during the mid-20th century, supplying over 30 million tons of uranium. During this time, toxic fallout from nuclear testing sites spread across the southwestern United States, with heavy deposits

landings within the Four Sacred Mountains. Uranium mining and nuclear testing that began in the 1950s have left behind a legacy of devastating health impacts, poisoned water sources, and environmental contamination that continues to harm hundreds of Americans, affecting Diné and our Tribal neighbors with particular severity.

In 1990, Congress passed the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), formally recognizing the government's role in the poisoning of these citizens. The Act included an apology stating, "The Congress apologizes on behalf of the Nation to the individuals described in subsection (a) and their families for the hardships they have endured." The bill continued, "It is the purpose of this Act to establish a procedure to make partial restitution to the individuals described in subsection (a) for the burdens they have borne for the Nation as a whole."

The Act, however, limited recognition and compensation to only a select few cancers and diseases for victims in a handful of counties in Nevada, Northern Arizona, and Southern Utah. Despite increasing evidence of the scale of the fallout and the types of illnesses inflicted, Congress has yet to act on expanding the RECA program in the last two decades, going so far as to let the RECA program lapse this past summer.

In his proclamation, President Nygren called on Congress to pass S.243, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act. This Act would recognize the historical injustices and expand and restore justice for all affected individuals and communities.

NNWO will continue to stand with Navajo leadership and the Diné in remembering the sacrifices made by American Downwinders and Navajo uranium miners.