

**With time running out, new legislation offers hope - and urgency - for survivors of nuclear testing and uranium mining**

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**September 22, 2021:** Today, Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID), Sen. Ben Lujan (D-NM), and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez (NM-03) introduced new legislation to extend and expand the 1990 Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). Joined by bipartisan co-sponsors in the Senate and in the House, the bills are being hailed by downwinders and others affected, who have waited years for justice.

Without congressional action, RECA sunsets in July of 2022. The bills introduced today would not only extend that time frame another 19 years, but would include downwinders in all of Utah, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, and Guam.

“RECA was never comprehensive enough,” says Salt Lake City downwinder and long-time advocate for downwinders Mary Dickson. “We applaud the work of Senators Crapo and Lujan and Representative Fernandez who recognize how their constituents have suffered. We have waited decades for justice. Too many have died, too many have become ill waiting. These bipartisan bills finally offer hope to those who have been excluded.”

Currently under RECA, downwinders who suffered from certain cancers and illnesses and who lived for a certain time frame in one of just 22 rural counties in Utah, Nevada and Arizona are covered, though studies since RECA was originally passed have shown that radioactive fallout from nuclear testing went far beyond those 22 counties, with Western states heavily impacted. For instance, northern Utah, including Salt Lake City, is currently not covered under RECA, though those areas were as hard hit by fallout, and some counties in Idaho and Montana saw higher levels than St. George, Utah.

“We greatly appreciate Rep. Burgess Owens, who signed on as a co-sponsor of the House bill. We hope the rest of our congressional delegation will be fully supportive of these RECA bills which greatly impact their constituents.” says Dickson. “The Cold War was not without casualties. We are those casualties — veterans of a war we never enlisted in.”

The new bill would raise compensation from \$50,000 to \$150,000 for all claimants. Other updates to the bill include expanding coverage to Guam and Trinity downwinders. While studies have shown the increased incidence of leukemia downwind of the Trinity site in New Mexico, downwinders of that first nuclear test in 1945 have never been included.

In addition to downwinders, RECA also covers uranium mill and mining workers, but those who worked in the industry after 1971 have never been covered. The bills introduced yesterday would fix that. “The RECA program is very important to these workers that unknowingly gave their lives during and after the Cold War,” says Linda Evers of Post 71 Uranium Workers Committee in New Mexico.

With strong signs of bipartisan support already, advocates are cautiously optimistic about the chances of the bills passing, but say it is vital that constituents to contact their representatives and senators to urge them to support and co-sponsor the bills.