



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 2, 2018

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Speaker Bates highlights Navajo Nation's efforts to extend the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act



Photo: Speaker LoRenzo Bates provided an update on the proposed Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2017, to Navajo community members at the Phil Thomas Performing Arts Center in Shiprock, N.M. on July 31, 2018.

SHIPROCK, N.M. – Speaker for the 23rd Navajo Nation Council LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, T’iis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) advocated for the extension of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act during a public meeting that was held at the Phil L. Thomas Performing Arts Center in Shiprock, on Tuesday. The purpose of the meeting was to update uranium workers and families regarding Senate Bill 197, entitled the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2017.

The act seeks to expand certain provisions that would include providing benefits to victims of nuclear fallout such as “downwinders” and former uranium mine workers. The proposed bill seeks to extend RECA for an additional 19 years, increase compensation for affected individuals, include affected areas in the states of Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and New Mexico, and expand eligibility requirements and benefits.

Speaker Bates said the purpose of the public event was to inform the Navajo people about the proposed extension of RECA, and to call on congressional leaders to hold public hearings for individuals affected by uranium mining and downwind contamination to provide their testimonies to ensure that RECA remains in tact beyond July 2022, which is when the RECA is set to expire.

“There are many families who have lost their lives, others continue struggling with health related issues, and perhaps these impacts continued to be carried on from generation to generation due to the uranium legacy,” said Speaker Bates. “However, a price cannot be placed on one’s life. The livelihood of our Navajos is important.”

RECA was first enacted in 1990, and the scope of coverage was broadened in 2000, however the provisions did not include certain states, post 1971 miners, specific types of cancers, expansion of benefits, and downwinders who experienced the poisonous fallout of nuclear weapons testing. The fallout affected water and food supplies, namely farms, farm animals, rivers, and lakes.

Speaker Bates stated that the Navajo Nation Council has continued to work with congressional leaders in a bipartisan fashion to allow the Navajo Nation to be a part of the discussion at the national level. In June, Vice President Jonathan Nez and Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz’t’i’i) provided testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary regarding RECA.

“Understanding that this senate bill is a bipartisan effort, it is important that the Navajo Nation work with both political parties to ensure that RECA is extended and affected Navajo people are provided just compensation and benefits,” said Speaker Bates. “I would like to thank the delegation that went to the senate hearing for being a voice for our Navajo people.”

Vice President Nez and Delegate Crotty were accompanied to the hearing by former Navajo uranium mine workers Phillip Harrison, Jr., Tommy Reed, Harry Desiderio, Marie Kirlie and her daughter Lenora Garcia, and Leslie Begay.

Speaker Bates encouraged the community members to reach out to their local, state, and federal leaders to advocate on their behalf to ensure their voices are heard, and assured Navajo citizens that Navajo leadership will continue to reach out to federal officials to hold a senate field hearing on the Navajo Nation.

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