

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 14, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson, Minority Leader Jeffries, Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chairwoman Murray, and Vice Chair Collins

We write with the utmost urgency regarding the impending sunset of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). It is imperative that S. 3853, the *Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act*, legislation that recently passed the Senate on a 69-30 vote, be attached to the upcoming fiscal year (FY) 2024 appropriations package.

As you know, the United States conducted scores of above-ground nuclear tests blanketing the American West in nuclear fallout as we perfected our nuclear arsenal. It is due to the sacrifice of the uranium workers and downwinders that the U.S. was able to win World War II and Cold War. However, we as a country have never adequately repaid that debt to all of the deserving victims.

In 1990, Congress established the RECA program in an attempt to provide partial restitution to Americans that were exposed to and got sick from radiation as the U.S. began our nuclear weapons program. While these important benefits have been made available to many individuals who developed specific cancers or other diseases as a result of their participation in atmospheric weapons tests, proximity to such tests, or work mining or transporting uranium, we continue to discover the far-reaching consequences of America's atomic research program. It has become abundantly clear that the actual harms of radiation exposure in the early days of the U.S. atomic weapons program well exceed RECA's current scope. This program must not only be reauthorized, but reformed to ensure that all affected Americans receive the restitution they deserve.

S. 3853 delivers long-overdue updates that will strengthen RECA to better reflect the harm caused by the U.S. government. It would extend eligibility for the first time to downwinders in New Mexico, northern Utah, and southern Arizona. Entire categories of uranium workers from the Navajo Nation and Texas would also be

included. These workers were previously denied relief, even though they bore similar risks as other covered coworkers. Lastly, the legislation would provide critical relief to Missourians exposed to radioactive waste the government haphazardly disposed of in multiple sites across the greater St. Louis area.

Importantly, RECA does not provide a blank check to anyone living in an affected state. RECA has always been targeted and need-based. Applicants must meet specific geographic, temporal, and disease requirements. The Senate-passed legislation builds upon these guardrails and has been updated to cut tens of billions of dollars from the initial cost of the reauthorization.

There is broad bipartisan and bicameral agreement that the United States must compensate American citizens who have gotten cancer and other diseases as a result of reckless government actions that exposed them to dangerous levels of radiation. We know the government did just that; RECA is the remedy for that harm. Absent Congressional action, RECA will sunset on June 7, 2024. Therefore, we urge you to include S. 3853 in the FY24 appropriations package that will soon come to the House floor.

Sincerely,

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