

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

HEARING ON "URANIUM CONTAMINATION IN THE NAVAJO NATION"

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

Mr. KUCINICH. Madam Speaker, I submit for the RECORD a copy of my opening statement delivered before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on October 23, 2007 on Uranium Contamination.

I want to thank and commend the Chairman for holding this hearing. Native Americans have borne a disproportionate burden of the toxic legacy from this country's pursuit of nuclear weapons and nuclear power. This is a topic that has been important to me for a long time. In this classic environmental justice story, we can see how long disadvantaged peoples have been burdened with inhumane levels of contamination. And we see how long it can take just to begin to undo the damage that such contamination brings.

The stories we will hear today will also make clear that quests for power—be they political or electrical—have no respect for life and exact an unacceptable cost to human health and the environment. The EPA guesses there are about 520 abandoned uranium mines in the Navajo nation and 1,200 abandoned mines in the area. The Navajo nation is home to 5 old uranium mills. Each of the mill sites and the mine sites represent a potential groundwater contamination site in addition to being sources of air and soil contamination.

There are many potential exposure routes. Children play in the water that accumulates in the radioactive tailing piles. Homes and hogans are built out of materials that are radioactive. Wind-blown dust from the tailings is inhaled. Groundwater is contaminated with uranium and its daughter products. Wildlife and plantlife concentrate the contamination and become food for other wildlife or for Navajo living off the land.

Uranium can be toxic in two ways. First, its properties as a chemical confer an ability to irreversibly destroy parts of the kidney when acting in isolation. But, like lead and mercury, it is a metal which interacts with uranium in the human body. Native Americans are known to experience disproportionately high levels of lead poisoning. And when uranium and lead both make their way into a person, the toxic effect on the kidney could be additive or even synergistic.

Uranium is also toxic because it naturally decays into other elements like radium, thorium and radon, each of which is also radioactive. Radon alone is the number two cause of lung cancer in the U.S. behind smoking.

The industrial process of extracting and concentrating uranium uses a host of other highly toxic compounds like various acids and cyanide, which are common mine tailing contaminants. And of course there are the other elements that co-occur with uranium like arsenic and fluoride which are left behind when the uranium is refined. Each of these compounds bears its own list of health effects. And each combination of two or three or more of these compounds brings their own set of health effects. It could take

generations just to completely understand the health effects of the contamination at all of these sites in question.

Making things worse, it is a formidable challenge just to understand the magnitude of the contamination—so much so, it hasn't even been done yet. No comprehensive review of groundwater contamination at all of the mine sites has been done. No comprehensive review for the presence of elevated levels of radiation in Navajo houses has been done even though dozens are known to have been built with radioactive materials. No comprehensive review of the health effects of the contamination from the mines and mills has been done. There is no way we can begin to address the problem if we can't define it.

One estimate I've heard is that the entire cleanup could cost around \$500 million. That seems unrealistically low. Efforts just to clean up the groundwater at three of the old mill sites on the Navajo nation are predicted to take 20 years. Already, the contamination has spanned generations and will span many more if we continue the current pace of cleanup.

Some effects can't be cleaned. Before the mines were opened, the Navajo way of life was heavily dependent on natural resources, which fostered a healthy respect for their environment. Not only did they rely on it for clean water and abundant food, but they incorporated it into their customs, their religion, and their way of life. Carol Markstrom and Perry Charley pointed out in their chapter of *The Navajo People and Uranium Mining*, that the contamination of livestock, of the medicinal herbs they used, and the water bodies their children played in, changed the view of the land. It was embraced and used as the conceptual center for their way of life. After the contamination, they feared it. It is hard to imagine how destabilizing it would be if we thought radioactive contamination permeated all that we rely on to be clean and safe.

Now, almost 60 years after the first uranium contamination began, there are corporations who want to reopen some of these very same mines and extract more uranium for nuclear power plants.

Never mind the contamination already created that we're still trying to define, let alone clean up. Never mind the permanent social damage inflicted by this contamination. Never mind that nuclear power is nowhere near economical. Never mind the lack of a viable and safe storage facility for the waste that will continue to be toxic for thousands of years.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about plans for cleaning up the contamination in shortest possible timeframe. And I stand ready to do whatever I can to not only help this process along, but to make sure we don't do anymore damage by failing to learn our lessons from the past.

IN MEMORY OF FLAVE
CARPENTER

HON. MIKE ROSS

OF ARKANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

Mr. ROSS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the memory of Flave Joseph Carpenter

Sr., formerly of Arkadelphia, Arkansas, who passed away October 15, 2007, at the age of 89.

Flave Carpenter spent his lifetime dedicated to his family, his community and his country. He was born in Clark County and his affinity for the region he called home can be measured by the enormous contributions he made to all the people and organizations he championed throughout his long life. He lived life to the fullest and would always say yes when he was called upon to help.

Flave Carpenter spent 28 years serving in the military, which encompassed tours in World War II and Korea where he was honored with multiple decorations including two Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars and a Silver Star. Upon retirement, he returned to Arkadelphia where he took his enthusiasm for serving his country and shifted it into public service. Over the years, he gave everything he had to the city of Arkadelphia and Clark County by serving as the executive director of several local businesses and organizations. He was appointed by then-Governor Dale Bumpers to the Arkansas Parks and Recreation Commission and was later elected chairman of the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce Directors. His passion for public service was rewarded in 1984 when then-Governor Bill Clinton inducted him into the Arkansas Parks and Tourism Hall of Fame. In 2002, he received the esteemed Lifetime Leadership in Economic Development recognition by the Arkansas Economic Developers.

In addition to his civic leadership, Flave Carpenter was also a man of devout faith. He was a member of the First Presbyterian Church where he served as deacon and elder. He also enjoyed the outdoors and the camaraderie that came with hunting, experiencing nature and the numerous recreational opportunities the State of Arkansas offered.

I send my deepest condolences to his three children, Diane McKenzie of Colorado Springs, Colorado, Jan Davis of Brazil, South America, and Flave Carpenter Jr., of Searcy; his sister Carolyn Jane Berry of Arkadelphia; and to his numerous grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews and friends. Flave Carpenter will be greatly missed in Arkadelphia, Clark County and throughout the state of Arkansas, and I am truly saddened by this loss.

THE FUTURE OF MEDICARE

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

Mr. KUCINICH. Madam Speaker, I submit for the RECORD a copy of my speech delivered at the summit on the future of Medicare on October 19, 2007.

Good afternoon. I want to thank each of you for coming to discuss one of the issues that reflects the values of this country—health insurance for retirees and the disabled. I want to especially thank the Senior

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