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The Honorable Senator Tom Udall  
Vice Chairman  
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs  
Washington, DC 20510

Good Morning Vice Chairman Udall,

It is an honor to be with you here today, Senator, to provide testimony. Thank you for inviting me to participate. I want to acknowledge that I also feel very honored to be a part of this distinguished panel to offer testimony on behalf of all the Downwinders of New Mexico. As you know, my name is Tina Cordova. I'm a native New Mexican, a mother, a grandmother, a daughter, a granddaughter, a sister, an aunt, a friend and I'm also a small business owner of 29 years. I have employed countless people through the years as one of very few women who hold a construction license in the State of New Mexico. I'm also a cancer survivor, a community organizer and the Co-Founder of the Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium (TBDC).

Joining me today in the audience are many other Downwinders representing communities all across New Mexico. Some of these people have had cancer themselves or are battling cancer now. All of them have lost loved ones, far too many to mention here. We certainly know and understand the importance of these hearings.

Senator Udall, as we thank you for this hearing, we also want to acknowledge and thank your father, Secretary Stewart Udall, posthumously, for the dedication he and, as a matter of fact, your entire family has had to the issue at hand. The creation and passage of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) has its origins in your family in the tireless work of your father who possessed the moral compass to well understand the damage that was done to human health as our government sought to develop and test nuclear devices.

In a 1992 article published in the *New York Times*, your father, Secretary Stewart Udall, stated the following: (The article is included here as an attachment.)

“There is nothing comparable in our history to the deceit and the lying that took place as a matter of official Government policy in order to protect this industry. Nothing was going to stop them and they were willing to kill our own people.”

Senator, we know that if it were within your power and your control, we wouldn't be here today to request the support of the US Senate to pass the Amendments to RECA. We would be here today to celebrate with you the justice we have fought so hard to achieve - the justice your father so valiantly fought for on behalf of the Downwinders and Uranium Workers.

Today we ask again for your support for the passage of Senate Bill S.947 Amendments to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, and adoption of language to coincide with and match the language in the recently introduced House Bill H.R. 3783 whose primary sponsor is Congressman Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico. We ask that the U.S. Congress extend compensation to the people of New Mexico, noting that New Mexico has played a pivotal role in this country's national security as home to the Manhattan Project, two national laboratories, Los Alamos and Sandia, and many other large government installations, such as Cannon, Holloman, and Kirtland Air Force Bases, and White Sands Missile Range.

On July 16, 1945, the first nuclear device was detonated in the desert of New Mexico at the Trinity site. The government has always characterized the area as remote and uninhabited, but we know from the US census data that there were at least 40,000 people living in a 50-mile radius of the test site. We've identified ranching families that lived as close as 12 miles to the test site. A few of these people are alive today to tell the stories of how one by one their loved ones have lost their lives to cancer.

The atomic bomb at Trinity had some unique qualities that produced significant fallout. It was the first nuclear device to ever be tested. Because the scientists working on the project had to make certain the test was a success, the bomb was packed with 13 pounds of plutonium. Only three pounds fissioned. The remaining ten pounds of unfissioned plutonium was joined with the soil, the sand, and the animal and plant life in the area and incinerated. The mushroom cloud rose over seven miles beyond the atmosphere, penetrating the stratosphere. The plutonium utilized has a half-life of 24,000 years. A green glass-like substance called Trinitite was produced at the site when the sand in the soil melted from the heat of the blast and was joined with the plutonium. The only place in the world you'll find Trinitite is in the desert of New Mexico.

Trinity was also the only bomb ever detonated on a platform, 100 feet off the ground. In comparison, the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were detonated at a height of 1,600 to 1,800 feet. The Trinity blast literally had nowhere to go once it impacted the earth and is the reason radioactive material was dispersed widely across the Tularosa Basin.

This radioactive fallout settled on everything. On the soil, in the water, in the air, on the plants, and on the skin of every living thing, both human and animal. It was a public health and an environmental disaster of grand proportions.

To fully understand how the fallout negatively impacted human health, we also have to understand what life was like in rural New Mexico in 1945. People lived very organic lifestyles. They had no running water and used cisterns, holding ponds, or ditches to collect water for drinking, cooking, bathing, cleaning and doing laundry. They depended on the earth, the soil, the water to produce all the food they ate. They had gardens and orchards and raised cows, pigs, chickens, sheep, goats, and the like for food. They hunted wild game when it was necessary. One man told me, “We didn’t have much, but we had all we needed, and it was all destroyed after the bomb.”

Dr. Louis Hempelmann, the physician who served as the Manhattan Project Medical Director, stated afterwards, and I quote:

“A few people were probably overexposed, but they couldn’t prove it and we couldn’t prove it so we just assumed we got away with it.”

Part of the history of Trinity is that there was a time following the detonation when people were allowed to freely go in and out of the site without obstruction. Children were taken there on field trips, ate their lunches there, and then packed their pockets with the radioactive Trinitite I mentioned before. They stored shards of Trinitite in cigar boxes under their beds along with other childhood treasures. People picnicked at the site and some ranchers have told me they hunted wild game there all the time.

New Mexicans were the first people in the world to be overexposed to radiation as a result of a nuclear test. The New Mexico Downwinders are the collateral damage that resulted from the extraction of minerals, the research, and development and testing of the first atomic bomb and the unfettered disposal of nuclear waste.

Few knew what had taken place when the bomb was detonated. It produced more heat and light than the sun and was more powerful than the bomb at Nagasaki. The blast took place before dawn and most people alive at the time have told me they thought it was the end of the world.

While it was not the end of the world, it was the beginning of the end for so many people, people like my own father who a four-year-old child was living in Tularosa about 40 miles south of the Trinity site, the way the crows fly. Like his neighbors, he and his family lived a simple but full life in rural New Mexico. As a result of his exposure, he paid the ultimate price for simply being a child raised in a downwind community.

My father, Anastacio Cordova, died after suffering for more than eight years with three different cancers for which he had no risk factors. He didn’t smoke, drink, use chewing tobacco, or have any viruses, yet he developed two distinctly different and rare oral cancers along with prostate cancer – which are all compensable under RECA. The doctors told us, “This just doesn’t happen. We just don’t see this.”

My father’s overexposure to high levels of radiation from the Trinity test as a child damaged his cells, which led to cancer and altered his DNA. Those genetics were passed on to me, and I am thank goodness a cancer survivor. Through our exposure we continue to pass on the damaged DNA to our children and our children’s children from one generation to another never to be the same.

As a result, we experience a cycle of poverty associated with the cost of taking care of our health when we get sick. Living in rural New Mexico, we can never get treatment at home because there are no medical facilities in the small towns and villages where we live. Since 1990, the RECA program has resulted in the establishment of medical clinics and screening and treatment facilities in other downwind communities. The proposed amendments would generate similar results where New Mexicans will be able to receive care.

People tell me stories of how they hold bake sales to buy pain medications or how they have to sell cattle to pay for their chemotherapy. How a wife has to go door to door in her Pueblo community to try to raise money for fuel to get her husband to and from his treatments in Albuquerque. When a family must spend all they have to obtain the medical care they need to survive cancer, they have nothing left to pass on but the damaged genetic legacy.

We would also like to add that this summer at least three significant events occurred that support and advance our work:

1. We were able to consult with Dr. Arjun Makhijani of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER). He brought to our attention that when nuclear bombs were tested above ground at the Nevada test site, monitors were in place in New Mexico that indicated fallout traveled to all parts of New Mexico. The fallout didn't end at the New Mexico border as is sometimes depicted in maps used by the government. It is important to note that exposure to radiation is cumulative and while many people in New Mexico received a high dose of radiation from the Trinity test, New Mexicans also continued to receive chronic doses from the fallout produced at the Nevada test site well into the summer of 1962. A sample of this data is included here as an attachment for reference purposes and is chronicled in the book entitled *Under the Cloud: The Decades of Nuclear Testing*, by Richard L. Miller.
2. Robert Alvarez and Kathleen M. Tucker authored an article published in the July issue of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* entitled *The Most Significant Hazard of the Entire Manhattan Project* that brings attention to the sharp rise in infant mortality recorded after the Trinity test. This spike was seen after there had been a steady multi-year decline in infant mortality. Senator Udall, babies in New Mexico were dying and when the government was asked about why or how the government again refused to admit they had overexposed the people in New Mexico to high levels of ionizing radiation. This is unconscionable. We should all be outraged that we were losing our babies and we were refused assistance by the government. The article is included here as an attachment.
3. Finally, Joseph J. Shonka, Ph.D., a health physicist and nuclear engineer, delivered a lecture entitled *The First Dirty Bomb, Trinity*, at a scientific symposium in Denver. Dr. Shonka worked extensively on the Los Alamos Historical Document Retrieval and Assessment (LAHDRA) Project, a project of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. His work on LAHDRA focused on Trinity and he is considered to be a foremost expert on all things relative to Trinity. His lecture focused on the extensive fallout produced by the Trinity bomb and the subsequent negative consequences to human health. We are working to bring Dr. Shonka to New Mexico to deliver his lecture in locations across our state. We believe the people of New Mexico deserve to hear what Dr. Shonka has to say about the toxic nature of the Trinity test to validate what we've experienced and to inform everyone why it is vital to amend RECA to include the Downwinders

of New Mexico. Dr. Shonka's resume along with a short abstract of his lecture is included here as an attachment.

Members of the Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium are here again today asking for fairness, asking that, after 74 years, we be treated the same as other Downwinders that have received compensation since RECA first passed in 1990. After all, RECA recognizes the responsibility of the Federal Government to apologize and provide health care and monetary compensation to individuals who contracted certain cancers and other serious diseases following their exposure to radiation during atmospheric nuclear weapons test. Downwinders and Uranium workers covered by RECA have received more than \$2.3 billion in claims. While this is a significant amount of money, and as you well know would be meaningful to the people of New Mexico what we covet most is fairness and inclusion in the health care coverage afforded by RECA. We don't want one dime more, or one dime less than what other Downwinders receive.

New Mexico Downwinders are hoping and praying that after 74 years, members of the US Senate will hear us with open ears, open hearts, and open minds. We ask that you put yourself in our shoes that you consider what it's like to walk with us just one day. Imagine what it's like to attend a funeral, a chemo infusion, or receive the horrible news that the cancer you've been fighting is back. Can you imagine telling their children that you are dying, and all you can wonder is: **Did I pass on my damaged genes to my children and grandchildren?**

No other state in the United States sacrificed more than New Mexico for our national security during World War II. And yet New Mexico continues to fight to be acknowledged and compensated for that sacrifice even as people continue to suffer and die as a result of that sacrifice.

As we approach the 75th anniversary of the Trinity test in 2020 there is an urgent moral and ethical imperative to right this wrong. There is a path to healing for the Downwinders of New Mexico whose lives and lands were taken advantage of and exploited during the Manhattan Project and beyond. It starts with the recognition of our service and our sacrifice to this great nation and is complete only when we are afforded the exact same care and coverage as other Downwinders. **Not one dime more. Not one dime less.**

Thank you, and I stand for questions.

Enclosures:

New York Times Article published in 1992 entitled *Santa Fe Portrait; A Longtime Pillar of the Government Now Aids Those Hurt by Its Bombs*.

Sample of Data from *Under the Cloud: The Decades of Nuclear Testing*, by Richard L. Miller.

Article from *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* entitled *The Most Significant Hazard of the Entire Manhattan Project*.

Dr. Joseph Shonka Resume and Abstract from lecture entitled *The First Dirty Bomb, Trinity*.