



REID CONTINUES TO FIGHT FOR COMPENSATION FOR NEVADA TEST SITE VETERANS

Thursday, June 15, 2006

Strategic Move Aims to Bring Legislation Closer to Passage

Washington, D.C. Continuing to live up to his vows of bringing fair compensation for Nevada Test Site workers, U.S. Senator Harry Reid today introduced his bill, the Nevada Test Site Veterans Compensation Act, as an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill now under debate on the Senate floor.

"These men and women are our atomic energy veterans," said Reid. "They helped this country win the Cold War, sacrificing their personal health in the process. After decades of waiting and suffering, it is time that we honored these sacrifices."

Reid's bill would cover all Nevada Test Site workers who were employed at the site between 1950 and 1993 if they were present during an atmospheric or underground nuclear test or performed certain work immediately after a test. It would also cover workers who were present at an episodic event involving radiation releases, such as an atomic blast, or worked at the Nevada Test Site for at least 250 days in a job that was, or should have been, monitored for exposure to ionizing radiation.

The U.S. held 100 above-ground nuclear tests and 828 underground tests at the site between 1951 and 1993. Many people at the Test Site worked with significant amounts of radioactive materials without knowledge of the risks. Some of those workers have been waiting for decades for the government to acknowledge the sacrifices they made for their country. Many have been waiting for compensation while they suffer from life-threatening cancers, and others have already died.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health is recommending that Nevada Test Site Cold War veterans who worked for at least 250 days between 1951 and 1962 be designated as a Special Exposure Cohort (SEC) -- a legal designation that already applies to workers at some other atomic sites. The SEC designation expedites the compensation process for workers exposed to radiation, and makes the compensation process fair and equitable. Reid's bill would expand the SEC designation to cover more Nevada Test Site veterans.

Today, the Presidential Advisory Board on Radiation and Worker Health Advisory Board held a hearing on the issue in Washington D.C. Reid submitted a statement, which is attached below.

The Presidential Advisory Board is recommending compensation for employees who worked at the site for more than 250 days from 1951 - 1962. Senator Reid is urging NIOSH to expand that group.



Nevadan Lori Hunton also testified at the hearing today, and read testimony from former Test Site workers and their surviving family members. Hunton is the surviving daughter of Oral Triplett, who was employed with the Nevada Test Site during the cold war.

"During the years that he was employed he was vented on, said Hunton. As a child I can remember that after one incident, when he was sent home after a post-shot drilling operation, he had little red cheerios on the side of his face. We have been seeking compensation for over 28 years.

Statement of U.S. Senator Harry Reid (D-NV)

The Presidential Advisory Board on Radiation and Worker Health

Thursday, June 15 2006

I am sorry that I could not be with you today, but want to thank the Advisory Board for moving forward on a Special Exposure Cohort for some Nevada Test Site workers employed at the site from 1951 through 1962, and I want to speak to the breadth of that compensation.

As you are meeting here today, I will be addressing this issue on the Floor of the Senate, urging my Congressional colleagues to support compensation for the Test Site's atomic energy veterans who valiantly served their country during the above-ground tests.

As you all know, I support a broader SEC than is going forward, including for below-ground workers. However, the discussion today is whether workers employed at the site less than 250 days deserve compensation. Clearly, they do.

Five years ago I worked with then-President Bill Clinton to ensure that Department of Energy workers and contractors who were exposed to radiation, beryllium or silica received compensation. Unfortunately, five years later, very few Test Site workers who have cancer have received compensation. As you know, Test Site workers are receiving compensation at a rate lower than the national average and many who have waited decades are being told that they have to wait longer. Many have already died while waiting for their compensation, stuck in a bureaucratic nightmare of obstruction and delay.

Congress and NIOSH have already designated classes of atomic energy veterans at many sites as members of the Special Exposure Cohort under EEOICPA. They have even provided compensation for workers employed less than 250 days.

Nevada Test Site workers deserve the same designation.

The contribution of the State of Nevada to the security of the United States throughout the Cold War and since is unparalleled. The United States conducted 100 aboveground and 828 underground nuclear tests at the Nevada Test Site from 1951 - 1992. That is 88 percent of the nuclear tests conducted in the United States.

Unfortunately, Nevada Test Site workers, despite performing this service for their country, having worked with significant amounts of radioactive materials and having known exposures leading to cancer, have been denied compensation under EEOICPA as a result of flawed calculations based on records that are incomplete or in error as well as the use of faulty assumptions and incorrect models.



NIOSH itself acknowledges that it cannot estimate the internal radiation dose received by employees at the Nevada Test Site from 1951 through 1962, yet is arguing that many Test Site workers, including those present for the atmospheric tests do not deserve compensation.

There are many reasons that NIOSH cannot estimate dose, including inadequate monitoring, incomplete radionuclide lists, and NIOSH's ignoring significant data on the Site and the tests.

We also know that DOE and its contractors did not monitor for beta radiation before 1966, that there were significant efforts to prevent badges from registering dose, that DOE ignored voluminous evidence and never even spoke with the lead health physicist at the site during both the above and below ground test (although the auditors did), that Nevada Test Site workers frequently worked greater than eight hour days, and that DOE claims to have dosimeter readings for workers when they were no longer employed at the site.

In addition, there is voluminous anecdotal information about the severe acute effects that many workers present during the tests suffered, workers that would not be covered within this cohort. I cannot tell you the number of stories that my staff has been told outlining these effects, many of which have been transmitted to the agencies. Lori Hunton, whose father, Oral Triplett, worked at the site, is here to share some of these stories with you.

Further, Under NIOSH's reasoning is in direct contravention of Congress intention in passing the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000. Under this rationale, someone who was present for all 100 above-ground tests would be denied compensation, even if they were on the front lines. This is not what Congress intended.

And, it is unfair.

These men and women, our atomic energy veterans, helped this country win the Cold War, sacrificing their personal health in the process. After decades of waiting and suffering, it is time that we honored these sacrifices.

I urge this Advisory Board to do the right thing and grant an SEC for workers employed at the site less than 250 days. All workers present at the atmospheric test should be granted compensation.

Please let me know how we can assist the board in its efforts.