

Testimony of  
**Ms. Rita Torres**

July 21, 2004

Mr. Chairman, Committee members. My name is Rita Torres and I am a resident of Surprise, Arizona. This testimony must come from me since it cannot come from the person who bore the brunt of this excruciating experience, my father, Joe Torres. If I could I would like to read my father's own words from a letter that he sent to the President of the United States in March of 2001 just before he passed away on March 21, 2001 from cancer that he suffered from as a result of his many years as a uranium miner.

Dear President Bush:

...I don't mean to complain, but on the other hand I do kind of have a bone to pick with the Federal Government. You see, the Federal Government made a promise to lots of folks in our part of the country. There was a problem and they were trying to fix it. "We passed a bill called the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act." This sounds great, as we have some serious health problems down here where we call home. With all the politicians gathered, you might have thought they would have figured this part out...they did not attach any funding to the program. Can you believe that? I couldn't either. You see they gave everyone an IOU. I wondered to myself how forgiving and patient the IRS would be if we all sent them IOUs come April 15th. And I don't know what experience you have with cancer, but it is not very patient. It eats away at your body and metastasises into other places that causes pain and all kinds of problems. It doesn't seem to want to wait while I write my congressman to see if he can work out the pesky little funding details in subcommittee. We believe in simple things, including if a man says he is going to help you, you can bet he will. You won't have to go chase him down and remind him; he will be there early and stay late until he knows that his services are no longer needed. So I feel a little sheepish reminding you, Mr. President, that approving a program then not funding it is sort of like offering help and leaving town. It just isn't right. My time here on earth is now very short. I am tired and would like to know that maybe some of what I do now might make it so other folks will not have to wait and be forgotten like I have been. It is hard to fight cancer and fight the government. I received an approval from the Department of Justice stating I would receive compensation under the RECA program because I spent many years mining uranium when our country needed it. When I received my approval it was a happy day. It brought me great relief just to know I would be receiving help and knowing that the government hadn't forgotten about me. I was also relieved to know that my wife of 55 years might have some assistance to live on until she can join me. Once I was a strong man, glad to work hard all day long. But I am no match for the pain, it has brought me to tears, it has brought my wife to tears as she struggles to make me comfortable, it has brought my children to tears to see their parents suffer so. I have exhausted all my means and have been waiting for some relief from my government since the approval letter arrived seven months ago. To be near the end, with no relief from my government has saddened me very much. I have spent a great deal of time lately filling out forms. I wonder if doing paper work is the last thing that I will remember doing before I die. I am trying to understand why I received approval seven months ago, but have not seen a penny...yet. Every

day another resident [of Monticello] is informed they have cancer. Have you had a son or a daughter die from cancer at a young age? It will make you hope for heaven because you are living through hell. I chuckle to myself to think I am writing to the President of the United States. I have nothing for you. I have no access to money. I have no influential friends. I grow weary, I cannot continue with this letter but please look into this matter. There are people here, Americans that are as real as those we send money to in foreign countries whenever a disaster hits there. I know you are busy, but not everyone has the luxury of many tomorrows to know that maybe they made a difference. Thank you Mr. President, Jose Torres.

Eight months after my father's death my younger brother was diagnosed with stomach cancer. This has affected three generations of the Torres family.

Please do not allow the program to go unfunded. Many are awaiting your decisions. We must move forward. IOUs would continue the injustice already done to these victims of radiation exposure.

Many have stepped forward to serve our government and now I ask you to serve your people by not continuing with IOUs and by funding RECA.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask that my father's letter to President Bush and the award letter sent to him approving his claim and informing him that the program was not funded be included as part of my testimony.

Thank you.