

Chairman Crapo, Ranking Member Booker, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning.

I am Eltona Henderson, I have owned and operated our bakery business since 1985. I have been on the Emmett City Council for the last ten and one half years. For the last fourteen years I have been working on the Downwinder issue. Both sides of my family have been in Idaho since the 1870s, they were pioneers before Idaho was a state. My children are the seventh generation to live in Idaho.

This is a story about the people of Emmett, Gem County, Idaho “The Valley of Plenty,” where I was born and raised.

In the 1950s and 60s, our valley was the ideal small farming community, we knew everyone. We grew our own food in gardens and orchards, we raised our own livestock for meat, and we had our own cows for milk. Our commercial orchards and fields sent out tons of fruit and vegetables by rail all over the United States.

Our valley is about 30 miles northwest of Boise, Idaho. In those days most people worked and lived right here and didn't have to travel to Boise to get anything. This was a fantastic place to grow up. Generations of families stayed here and worked the land.

There was always the thought when I was a kid that if people didn't die from old age, then it was a traffic accident or cancer. No one knew why, that's just the way it was. We all lost a lot of family and friends to cancer.

Fast forward to July 2004.

Sheri Garmon contacted Janet Monti, a reporter at the Messenger-Index, our local newspaper. Sheri was a few years older than me and grew up on a dairy farm here in Emmett. She was dying from five forms of cancer: thyroid, breast, lung, liver and bone. She had read on the Internet that Congress was looking into expanding RECA, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act and Idaho was not included.

Janet started doing research for the paper and found that nuclear fallout from 100 aboveground nuclear tests from the Nevada Test Site from 1951-1962 fell on Idaho and the surrounding states.

Janet wrote her first newspaper story at the end of July 2004. That is when I got involved in this fight to get Idaho included in RECA. Within a couple weeks Preston J Truman, of the Downwinders Organization contacted me and we have been working together on this issue since then. That is when I found out that we were all Downwinders of the nuclear fallout from the Nevada Test Site.

Sheri, Janet, Preston and I realized we needed to let the Downwinders of Gem County speak to what had happened to them and their families because of the fallout. We held a rally at the Emmett City Park on September 11, 2004. Over 300 people, from our town of 6500, showed up and listened to what had been discovered and listened to the stories of cancers in multiple people and families. Idaho's Senator Mike Crapo came to our rally and spoke to us that he would help Idaho to be included in RECA.

I started writing down names of people who I have known who have had cancer in Gem County, to date I have 1060 names. How many of you know that many friends and family that have had cancer? Some entire families have been wiped out by cancer, where there was no cancer before the 1950s. Sheri Garmon lost her battle with cancer that had lasted 12 years. She passed away September 22, 2005. I promised her I would not give up on this issue until Idaho was included in RECA. She spent her last year on this earth fighting for this cause, I will never give up either.

The National Cancer Institute or NCI released their study in 1997, of I-131 in the fallout and how it contaminated the US. It ranked them, county by county. The most contaminated county in America is in the middle of Montana, the third is Gem County, Idaho, where I live. The next three in line are in Idaho and the sixth one in Utah, where Preston is from. Of the top 25 counties all are in Idaho and Montana except number six in Utah. Why were Idaho and Montana left out of RECA?

Why were other downwind states not included? The government once described the downwind region as “the low use segment of the population”. The tests were intentionally delayed until the wind was blowing in a different direction, away from Las Vegas and Los Angeles. In 1953 the government did the test series called Upshot-Knothole, in less than 90 days they detonated 12 mammoth shots that totaled 252 kilotons. Waiting for the contaminated winds to blow north and east. The two bombs dropped on Japan together were about 36 kilotons. Once during an AEC meeting in the early 1950s, AEC Commissioner Libby stated, “People have got to learn the facts of life and the facts of life are fallout.” Commissioner Strauss stated “It’s certainly all right, they say, if you don’t live next door to it.” Commissioner Nichols added “Or live under it”. The innocent people that were targeted by our government to receive the nuclear fallout need to be compensated under the RECA bill.

This Bill is to try to right a tragic wrong on innocent people that were just trying to live their lives and be patriotic citizens. The government covered up what they were doing for years during and after the aboveground testing. They said there was no harm, the radiation didn't leave the testing grounds, and they said it was safe. They even told people on the radio to go out at certain times, to participate in history, by watching the tests go off.

Idaho did not know we were in the direct line of fire from the test site. We didn't know we were dying with cancer because of the test site, until 2004.

Then life changed for me - that is when I realized all the family members that had cancer and had died from cancer were all here in the Emmett area during the testing times. I have 38 people in my family that have had cancer, 14 have died from the disease.

My mom and dad owned a 65 head dairy farm when I was born in 1960. My dad's thyroid dissolved in the 1980s. My mother had breast

cancer at 69. My brother that is seven years older than me, had testicular cancer twice and had both testicles removed, then had cancer in his urinary tract. This was all in the same year when he was only 48 years old. His cancer doctor told him he had to be exposed to large amount of radiation, like in a nuclear blast to cause this cancer. My brother five years older than me had prostate cancer at 53. Up until two weeks ago I was cancer free. Now I join my family in this fight against cancer. My sister who was born in 1970, after the aboveground testing, is in good health.

All of the healthy habits of growing and eating your own food, was an eventual death sentence to some in my community. We ate contaminated fruits, vegetables, meat and drank tainted milk. All for what?

This bill will compensate Downwinders that all have similar stories as mine. Unfortunately, some will never tell their stories to you, they have passed away. Some are too sick to travel. Others don't

have the resources to travel to testify before you, they are paying for doctor and hospital bills, losing their homes and everything they have worked for and paying to bury their loved ones that died too soon. I wish the Judiciary Committee would go to Idaho and hold field hearings on RECA, Downwinders could talk to you for days. We were all unknowing and unwilling participants of the Cold War, but we will never have flag draped coffins at our funerals.

When we are included in RECA we will be able to access RESEP clinics (Radiation Exposure Screening Education Program). With access to the clinics, Downwinders will be able to get early screenings for cancer and save lives.

If Energy workers that have jobs in the nuclear industry get cancer, they have their medical bills paid for life and receive \$150,000 in compensation. The current RECA bill compensates 21 counties in Arizona, Nevada and Utah in the amount of \$50,000 in a one-time payment, if you have 1 of 19 types of

cancer, not all cancers are included. Not all of the counties in those states are included and Mohave County, Arizona is split in half! This new bill adds the remaining counties of those states and includes Montana and Idaho, which were the hardest hit. It also adds New Mexico, Colorado and the Island of Guam. The new RECA bill changes the amount in compensation to match the Energy Workers bill. Energy workers knew the risk of taking the jobs, Downwinders didn't even know we were exposed to radiation, let alone targeted by our own Government. Downwinders deserve this. It is clearly discriminatory to compensate some Downwinders and not all Downwinders.

My family is just one cancer story from our beautiful valley. It seems that because of the nuclear testing our "Valley of Plenty" is now "The Valley of Death".

Thank you for your time and for bringing light to this important issue. I pray you will pass S-197 on to the full Senate, because it is the right thing to do.

