



Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium  
7518 2<sup>nd</sup> St. NW  
Albuquerque, NM 87107  
(505) 897-6787  
[tcordova@queston.net](mailto:tcordova@queston.net)  
[www.trinitydownwinders.com](http://www.trinitydownwinders.com)

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The Honorable Mike Crapo  
Acting Chairman  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cory Booker  
Acting Ranking Member  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Crapo, Ranking Member Booker, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Good morning.

It is an honor and a privilege to be with you today to provide testimony. 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 28 years who came to Washington in 2000 as the New Mexico Small

Business Person of the Year awarded by the Small Business Administration I have employed countless people through the years as one of the only women who holds 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 women who traveled here representing communities all across New Mexico and states like Texas and California, where downwinders from New Mexico have moved. Some of these women 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 this hearing.

We are here today to ask you to support the passage of Senate Bill 197, Amendments to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, with our recommendations outlined in our Health Impact Assessment report, which you all have a copy of, listed on pages 11 and 75. Three of the recommendations address eligibility. We ask that you 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 area was then and is still today characterized as remote and uninhabited, but we know from the census data that there were thousands of 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, and because the scientists working on the project had to make certain the test was a success, the bomb was packed with 13 pounds of weapons-grade plutonium. Only three pounds of the 13 pounds of plutonium fissioned. The remaining ten pounds of unfissioned plutonium was joined with the soil, the sand, the animal and plant life

in the area and incinerated and traveled over seven miles past 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 you'll find Trinitite is in the desert of New Mexico.

It was also the only bomb ever detonated on a platform 100 feet off the ground. In comparison, the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were detonated at a height of 1,600 to 1,800 feet. The 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 an environmental disaster of grand proportions and the total destruction of a way of life for everyone who lived in New Mexico at the time.

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."

The physician who served as the Manhattan Project Medical Director Dr. Louis Hempelmann, 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, fed there, and then packed their pockets with the radioactive Trinitite I mentioned before. They stored it in cigar boxes

under their beds. 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 exposed to radiation as a result of a nuclear test. The New Mexico Downwinders are the collateral damage that resulted from the development and testing of the first atomic bomb.

No one knew what had taken place when the bomb was detonated. It produced more heat and light than the sun. 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 was a 4-year-old child 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, and he paid the ultimate price for simply being a child raised in a downwind community.

My father Anastacio Cordova died at the age of 71 after suffering for more than eight years with three different cancers that he didn't have risk factors for. He didn't smoke, drink, use chewing tobacco or have any viruses and yet he got two distinctly different 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, too, am a cancer patient. 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 from the radiation overexposure. 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. It places us in a position of undue stress both emotionally and financially.

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 has to spend all they have to obtain the medical care they need to survive cancer they can never develop assets. They only develop debt. There is nothing to pass on or contribute for a child or grandchild's higher education.

Members of the TBDC are here today asking for fairness, asking that after 73 years we might be treated the same as other downwinders.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act recognizes the responsibility of the Federal Government to apologize and provide monetary compensation to individuals who contracted certain cancers and other serious diseases following their exposure to radiation during atmospheric nuclear weapons test. Other downwinders in the United States have received more than \$2.25 billion in claims, and while that would be incredibly significant for us, what we covet most is the health care card they receive that entitles them to the best health care available anywhere with no co-payments, no deductibles, and no limits. Again, we are simply asking to be treated the same as other downwinders who have been overexposed by radiation due to nuclear testing.

Those of us present along with all the people we represent are hoping and praying that you hear us with open ears, open hearts, and open minds. I ask that you put yourself in our shoes, that you might consider what it's like to walk with us just one day. That you might imagine what it's like to go with us to a funeral, or to a chemo infusion, or for an MRI, or to receive the horrible news that the cancer you've been fighting is back. In our communities we don't wonder if we're going to get cancer we only wonder when.

There is an urgent moral and ethical imperative to right this wrong. There is a path to healing for us. It starts with the recognition of our service and our sacrifice and is complete when we are afforded the exact same care as other Downwinders.

I have with me letters of support from the bipartisan leadership of the New Mexico State House and Senate supporting the work of the Tularosa Basin

Downwinders Consortium, along with a series of memorials that were passed unanimously by the New Mexico State Legislature supporting the RECA amendments.

Thank you and I stand for questions.

Enclosures:

June 25, 2018 letter from New Mexico State Senate Bipartisan Leadership

June 25, 2018 letter from New Mexico State Speaker of the House

Senate Memorial 35 – 2014 – sponsored by Senator Morales

Senate Memorial 101 – 2015 – sponsored by Senator Pinto

Senate Memorial 067 – 2016 – sponsored by Senator Morales

Senate Memorial 085 – 2017 – sponsored by Senator Pinto

House Memorial 36 – 2014 – sponsored by Representative Egolf

House Memorial 070 – 2015 – sponsored by Representative Johnson

House Memorial 40 – 2017 – sponsored by Representatives Johnson and  
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