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Health impacts from the nuclear weapons testing that occurred in Nevada during the Cold War era are said to have extended well beyond the areas in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah that are known as “Downwinder” areas.

With that in mind, bipartisan legislation was introduced in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives this week that aims to significantly expand a compensation program for people who have suffered from cancers linked to radiation from uranium mining and nuclear testing during the 1950s and 1960s.

Because of the prevailing winds that carried the contamination from the mining and testing, the affected residents were termed “Downwinders” and are considered at risk for 19 types of cancer, including esophageal and breast cancer, as well as non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

Sherrie Hanna, a Prescott native who has been vocal about the impact that the testing had on residents of Prescott, noted this week that the proposed federal legislation

would expand the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) to include Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and New Mexico.

RECA, which was originally passed in 1990, currently limits compensation to people who lived in parts of Arizona, Nevada, and Utah during the time of the testing. Along with adding the other western states, Hanna said the legislation would also expand the eligible areas in Arizona — something that she said would help more of the affected residents.

“A lot of people affected weren’t included (in the original boundaries of the RECA compensation),” Hanna said. “They know from cancer screenings that the fallout affected other parts of the country.”

Hanna has also stressed the importance of extending the timeframe of RECA, which is slated to sunset in July 2022 if not renewed. The legislation introduced this week would extend the compensation program another 19 years.

It would also increase the amount of the compensation that a cancer victim of the radiation can receive — from the current \$50,000 to \$150,000, and would provide coverage for additional forms of cancer.

“I’m pleased with it,” Hanna said of the proposed legislation. “It’s been a long time coming.”

Hanna, a Downwinder herself, has been working for years to bring attention to the plight of those who were affected. Both her father, Ken Wayman, and her husband, John Hanna Sr., a former Prescott City Councilman, died of cancers linked to the radiation exposure.

As an advocate of the program, Hanna said she continues to get questions from long-time Prescott residents who have been diagnosed with radiation-related cancers. “It’s just apparent that these cancers rise up when you’re in your 50s and 60s,” she said.

Hanna said that so far, the RECA program has paid out \$2.3 billion in compensation to cancer sufferers and their families.

The cost of the proposed legislation has yet to be determined, she said, adding that it is expected to come at a high cost – in part because of the retroactive payments to victims in the added states.

Although uncertain when the legislation would be voted on, Hanna stressed that Downwinder advocates would be working to rally support for the legislation in the

meantime.

Hanna is collecting signatures of support on her website, <https://justice4downwinders.weebly.com/>, and she encourages residents to go to the website to get more information about the proposed legislation.

The legislation was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, a Democrat from New Mexico, and Sen. Mike Crapo, a Republican from Idaho. In the House, the legislation is being supported by Democratic Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez of New Mexico and Republican Reps. Yvette Herrell of New Mexico and Burgess Owens of Utah.

Since 2011, January 27 has been recognized as the Day of Remembrance for Downwinders, commemorating the day on Jan. 27, 1951, when the first above-ground nuclear weapons tests were conducted at the Nevada Proving Grounds about 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

(This article includes information from an Associated Press article on the Sept 22 introduction of the legislation.)

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