



Update: Navajo Nation Press Conference Regarding H.R. 4426 RECA Amendments

July 27, 2023



Provided by:



NAVAJO NATION
WASHINGTON OFFICE



THE NAVAJO NATION WASHINGTON OFFICE

Navajo Nation Press Conference

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For Immediate Release

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**MEDIA ADVISORY:
NAVAJO NATION RADIATION EXPOSURE COMPENSATION ACT AMENDMENTS
PRESS CONFERENCE**

On July 27th, 2023, the Navajo Nation Washington Office will be hosting a press conference regarding amendments to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act introduced by Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez (NM-3). The Navajo Nation supports the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act amendments and request its swift passage to assist people who have long suffered the effects of exposure from harmful radiation, including our Navajo people who continue to suffer from chronic illnesses. The press conference will illuminate the health impacts and uplift the neglected voices with key Navajo Nation leaders and sponsor of this legislation.

Date and Time: July 27th, 2023, at 10 am

Location: 750 First St. NE, Washington, DC 20002

Panelists: Crystalyne Curley, Navajo Nation Speaker
Justin Ahasteen, Navajo Nation Washington Office Executive Director
Austin Tsosie, Dine Development Corporation Chief Executive Director
Teresa Leger Fernandez, House of Representatives (NM-03)
Dr. Jonathan Samet, MD, MS, Colorado School of Public Health Dean
Phil Harrison, Former Uranium Worker

The Navajo Nation Washington Office is an extension of the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President. The Office represents the diverse interests of the Navajo people by working with White House, Congressional, and Federal agencies to develop federal laws, policies, executive orders, and practices that reinforce the federal trust responsibility, respect tribal sovereignty, and achieve the priorities of the Navajo Nation.



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NAVAJO NATION RADIATION EXPOSURE COMPENSATION ACT (RECA) PRESS CONFERENCE PANEL AGENDA

July 27, 2023

10 am

- 1) Justin Ahasteen, *Navajo Nation Washington Office Executive Director*
- 2) Jonathan M. Samet, MD, MS, *Colorado School of Public Health Dean*
- 3) Crystalyne Curley, *Speaker of the 25th Navajo Nation Council*
- 4) Teresa Leger Fernández, *U.S. Representative (NM-03)*
- 5) Austin Tsosie, *Diné Development Corporation Chief Executive Officer*
- 6) Phil Harrison, *Former Uranium Worker*
- 7) Question and Answer Session





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PANELISTS



Crystalyne Curley, *Speaker of the 25th Navajo Nation Council*

Speaker Crystalyne Curley was elected in 2022 to represent the Navajo Chapters of Tselani/Cottonwood, Nazlini, Blue Gap/Tachee, Low Mountain, and Many Farms on the Navajo Nation Council. Speaker Curley graduated with two bachelor's degrees from the Arizona State University and earned a master's in health administration from the University of New Mexico. In January 2023, the council elected Curley as the 25th Navajo Nation Council speaker, making her the first woman to hold the position and the first fluent Navajo speaker since 2014.



Justin Ahasteen, *Navajo Nation Washington Office Executive Director*

Justin Ahasteen is Bilagáana (white) born for Tótsohnii (Big Water). His maternal grandfather is Bilagáana, and his paternal grandfather is Kiis'áanii (Hopi). Justin is from White Cone Arizona and is a proud graduate of Holbrook High School. Director Ahasteen has 10 years of Marine Corps military and professional experience working to advance the betterment of people's lives in healthcare and governmental relations.



Teresa Leger Fernández, *Congresswoman (NM-03)*

Teresa is a 17th generation Northern New Mexican. Born in Las Vegas, New Mexico, she was part of the state's first Head Start class. Teresa went on to graduate from Yale and Stanford Law School. After graduating from law school, Leger Fernandez returned to New Mexico to work as an attorney, specializing in community-building and tribal advocacy. She also worked as a liaison between the White House Office and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. For 30 years, Leger Fernandez has operated Leger Law and Strategy, LLC in Santa Fe. The firm focuses on community development, tribal advocacy, civil rights, and social justice. Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez has represented the third congressional district of New Mexico since 2021.



Austin Tsosie, *Diné Development Corporation Chief Executive Officer*

As DDC Chief Executive Officer, former President of DDC IT Services, and Diné tribal member, Austin Tsosie has been very successful in shaping the organization's culture, building operations, fueling business development, and enhancing tribal relations to position DDC subsidiaries as elite, Navajo owned businesses.



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Jonathan M. Samet, MD, MS, *Colorado School of Public Health Dean*

Dr. Samet a pulmonary physician and epidemiologist, is Dean of the Colorado School of Public Health. Previously, Dr. Samet was the Flora L. Thornton Chair for the Department of Preventive Medicine at the University of Southern California and Director of the USC Institute for Global Health. Dr. Samet received a bachelor's degree in chemistry and physics from Harvard College, an MD degree from the University of Rochester's School of Medicine and Dentistry, and a Master of Science degree in Epidemiology from the Harvard School of Public Health. His research focuses on the health risks of inhaled pollutants—particles and ozone in outdoor air and indoor pollutants including secondhand smoke and radon. He has also investigated the occurrence and causes of cancer and respiratory diseases, emphasizing the risks of active and passive smoking. For several decades, he has been involved in global health, focusing on tobacco control, air pollution, and chronic disease prevention.



Phil Harrison, *Former Uranium Worker*

is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and originally from Cove, Arizona. Mr. Harrison was born in Farmington, NM and currently resides in Rio Rancho, New Mexico. Mr. Harrison is a former underground uranium worker and previously Remediation Specialist with DOE uranium remediation projects at the old Rare Metals Mill in Tuba City, Arizona. He played a key role in the passage of RECA 1990 Law, successfully working with attorney E. Cooper Brown to pass the RECA July 2000 Amendments. Mr. Harrison has a total of 20 years of leadership experience with the Red Valley Navajo Chapter located in Northeastern Arizona. Mr. Harrison provided expert witnessing several times before the US Congress and received a Nuclear Free Future award in December of 2006. He enlisted and served in the United States Air force and was Honorably Discharged in 1976. Mr. Harrison continues to advocate for home care services, just compensation, assist with prepping DOJ claims, Downwinders claim, reviews client's complicated government correspondence, teaches awareness of contaminated radioactive structures, and does community public hearings on the Nuclear Fuel Cycle.



RECOMMENDED READINGS

[Luján, Crapo, Leger Fernandez Reintroduce Legislation to Strengthen RECA](#)



Newsroom • Press Releases

July 6, 2023

Luján, Crapo, Leger Fernández Reintroduce Legislation to Strengthen RECA

[Advocates, lawmakers renew push for RECA to include Trinity Downwinders – KOB4 – July 7, 2023](#)

Advocates, lawmakers renew push for RECA to include Trinity Downwinders

Jonathan Fink / KOB
July 7, 2023 - 8:28 PM



ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — On July 16, 1945, the U.S. secretly tested the world's first nuclear weapon in New Mexico. Now known as the Trinity Test, it poisoned thousands of nearby New Mexicans.

[New Mexico lawmakers still trying for radiation exposure compensation – KROE News 13 – July 6, 2023](#)



[The Navajo Suffered From Nuclear Testing. Oppenheimer Doesn't Tell Our Story—Dr. Buu Nygren Op-Ed](#)

