September 12, 2011

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Sessions:

Several months ago we introduced S. 791, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act of 2011 (RECA) that was referred to your committee. This bill would address key deficiencies in RECA, and extend compensation to a number of currently unqualified but suffering uranium workers and downwinders. Considering the importance of RECA to many of our constituents, we respectfully request that you move quickly to hold a hearing to bring to light existing deficiencies in the compensation program and to review our legislation.

As the United States government built up its Cold War nuclear arsenal during the mid-20th century, many Americans paid the price with their health. Some were sickened through exposure to aboveground atomic weapons tests. Others were exposed to heavy doses of radiation from working in the uranium mining industry. To compensate these individuals for their unwitting exposure to dangerous levels of radiation, Congress passed the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act in 1990. In the ensuing years, shortcomings in the original law have become apparent. It is time to review the effectiveness of RECA, and to renew debate over the populations who should be compensated through the program.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2011 would expand the geographic qualification for compensation for those made sick from exposure to radiation from aboveground atomic weapons test at the Nevada Test Site. The bill would also extend compensation for individuals who were exposed to the original atomic bomb test at the Trinity site and to those in Guam who were exposed to atomic weapons tests in the Pacific. The bill would further extend compensation to uranium workers who worked in mines and mills after 1971, and make other smaller improvements to RECA.

We thank you for your leadership on the Judiciary Committee, and we urge you to move forward with a hearing on compensation for radiation exposure. We look forward to discussing the changes proposed in our bill, and believe it is time for a productive debate on the need for improving the original act.

Sincerely,

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator
Mike Crapo  
United States Senator

Michael Bennet  
United States Senator

James Risch  
United States Senator

Mark Udall  
United States Senator