

## **To Members of the House Judiciary Committee**

My name is Mary Dickson. I am a lifelong resident of Salt Lake City, Utah and a survivor of nuclear weapons tests conducted by the U.S. government. Like tens of thousands of Americans, I grew up under the clouds of radioactive fallout from nuclear weapons testing.

I was only a child during the years of atmospheric detonations in Nevada. How were any of us to know that a silent poison was threading its way through our bodies when a government we trusted repeatedly assured us that "there is no danger" and distributed pamphlets telling us not to let reports of Geiger counters going crazy bother us.

Between 1951 and 1992, the U.S. government detonated 100 nuclear bombs in the atmosphere and 828 underground – all of them more powerful than the bombs that leveled Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Fallout did not respect county or state borders. Winds carried it hundreds, even thousands of miles away from the Nevada Test Site, exposing countless people living downwind to deadly levels of radiation.

In my 20s, I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. I underwent a thyroidectomy and radiation treatments. On my hospital door and my hospital bracelet was the radiation symbol. I was the radioactive material. When I left the hospital, they burned my clothes and told me not to be around pregnant women or try to get pregnant for a year. Tumors on my ovaries and uterus a few years later meant that I never could have children. Three years ago, I underwent emergency surgery as a result of scar tissue from that hysterectomy.

My older sister and I compiled a list of childhood friends and neighbors who had cancer, tumors and autoimmune diseases. That list includes 54 people who lived in a five-block area of our childhood neighborhood. In 2001, I added my sister's name to the list. She was only 46 when she died, leaving 3 young children behind. Now, my younger sister is battling a rare cancer and my youngest sister is being treated for autoimmune disorders.

I could regale you for hours with heartbreaking stories of the harm wreaked on unsuspecting Americans by radioactive fallout. The Cold War had casualties and we are those casualties. We have suffered and continue to suffer, we have comforted the sick, buried and mourned the dead, worried with each ache, and worried with each

pain and new lump that we are getting sick again. Our families and communities have been devastated physically, emotionally and financially. The genetic damage has been passed to new generations.

We were patriotic Americans who believed our government when it assured us, "there is no danger." Our government not only lied to us for decades, but considered us expendable. We have paid and continue to pay an enormous price.

A government that knowingly harmed its own citizens has a moral responsibility to take care of those harmed.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) of 1990 was a good start, but it wasn't enough. It has always been extremely limited in scope. For instance, neither I, my family, my neighbors nor anyone in northern Utah or surrounding states is included for compensation. We now know more about the extent of fallout and why RECA must be expanded.

Without congressional action, RECA expires in July, which is why it is urgent that Congress pass the bipartisan HR 5338 introduced by Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez of New Mexico and co-sponsored by 60 members of the House.

For those of us who have suffered for decades and are burdened with ongoing medical expenses, time is literally running out. Too many have already died waiting for justice.

When RECA was passed in 1990, then President George HW Bush admitted that it could only be considered partial restitution. What price, after all, can you put on human health or a human life?

You now have a unique opportunity to right the wrongs of the past supporting this bill during markup. It is absolutely the right thing to do.

Mary Dickson

Utah Downwinders