

# Senate passes bill to compensate more Americans exposed to radiation

March 8 2024, by Robin Foster

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More Americans exposed to radiation caused by the government would be compensated under a [bill](#) that passed the U.S. Senate Thursday.

The bipartisan legislation, which would cost an estimated \$50 billion, would expand the [Radiation Exposure Compensation Act](#) (RECA) to include more people who believe that [radiation exposure](#) caused illnesses such as [cancer](#). The bill passed the Senate 69-30, but its prospects in the House are uncertain, the Associated Press reported.

If the measure does pass the House, the White House indicated that President Joe Biden would sign it into law.

"The President believes we have a solemn obligation to address toxic exposure, especially among those who have been placed in harm's way by the government's actions," the White House said in a [statement](#).

In 2022, Biden signed an executive order extending RECA for two years, but that extension expires in June. The new bill would extend the law for five years and expand coverage to include people in Missouri as well as Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alaska and Guam.

One of the areas where nuclear waste has seeped into nearby bodies of water is near St. Louis: Uranium processing there played a pivotal part in developing the [nuclear weapons](#) that helped end World War II. Eighty years later, the region is still dealing with contamination at several sites, the AP reported.

"I am a two-time breast cancer survivor," said Missouri Rep. Chantelle Nickson-Clark, a Democrat who represents Florissant, an area that sits along the St. Louis creek that was contaminated by [nuclear waste](#) in the 1960s.

"I lost my mother to breast cancer, an aunt to breast cancer. Two cousins that are [breast cancer](#) survivors, a nephew that had a cancerous brain tumor and other genetic mutation deficiencies in my family," she told

the AP. "I'm here to represent a community that has been underserved, undervalued, underrepresented and unheard."

Advocates have been fighting for years to expand the program to include more sites in the United States, the AP reported. In New Mexico, residents living near the spot where the first atomic bomb was detonated in 1945—the top-secret Manhattan Project—were not warned of the radiological dangers and didn't realize that an atomic blast was the source of the ash that rained down upon them after the explosion.

"You know, we are ground zero," Tina Cordova, a cancer survivor from New Mexico, told the AP. "We're where it all started. The origins of the whole nuclear program are in New Mexico, and we were the first people exposed to radiation as a result of an atomic bomb and to be left out for 79 years is just truly unacceptable."

"People have been waiting for justice for far too long, and it's just simply time to do the right thing," she said.

Other advocates for the bill said it represents hope for them and their families as they struggle with medical costs.

Christen Commuso, who works for the advocacy group Missouri Coalition for the Environment, told the AP she has dealt with many health issues, including [thyroid cancer](#), and has had to ration her care at times because it is so costly.

"It's not about putting money in my pocket," Commuso said. "It's about providing me the ability to get the care that I deserve and need."

**More information:** The Health Resources and Services Administration has more on [radiation exposure](#).

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