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HOUSE MEMORIAL 82

52ND LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2015

INTRODUCED BY

Georgene Louis

A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO COMPILE EXISTING DATA ON THE HEALTH OF NEW MEXICO CITIZENS IMPACTED BY URANIUM MINING IN THE GRANTS MINERAL BELT, DEVELOP A HEALTH PROFILE BASELINE FOR THOSE CITIZENS AND PROPOSE MINING PERMIT CONDITIONS THAT CAN MITIGATE HEALTH PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH MINING AND ALLEVIATE THE CONTINUING NEGATIVE HEALTH-RELATED CONSEQUENCES OF HISTORICAL MINING ACTIVITY.

WHEREAS, the Grants mineral belt produced more uranium than any other district in the world from the 1940s to the 1980s and more than one-half of all the uranium used by the United States for its weapons program; and

WHEREAS, the mining and minerals division of the energy, minerals and natural resources department has identified two hundred fifty-nine uranium mining sites in New Mexico, of which .199439.1

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1 one hundred thirty-seven show no record of reclamation; and

2 WHEREAS, the Navajo Nation has over one thousand abandoned
3 uranium mines; and

4 WHEREAS, the Pueblo of Laguna was the site of the world's
5 largest open-pit uranium mine, known as the Jackpile mine; and

6 WHEREAS, uranium mining and milling has left a legacy of
7 contaminated air, land and water; and

8 WHEREAS, former miners and millers suffer health impacts
9 as a result of working in these unsafe, contaminated
10 conditions; and

11 WHEREAS, in 1979, Church Rock, New Mexico, was the site of
12 the worst nuclear disaster in the United States when more than
13 ninety-four million gallons of radioactive waste emptied into
14 the local stream system, releasing three times more radiation
15 than the Three Mile Island incident; and

16 WHEREAS, communities next to the Homestake-Barrick Gold
17 uranium mill tailings pile in Cibola county are exposed to
18 radiation in the ambient air that is five and one-half times
19 the United States environmental protection agency's acceptable
20 limit, resulting in an increased lifetime cancer risk that is
21 eighteen times the amount that the United States environmental
22 protection agency deems acceptable; and

23 WHEREAS, cancer, miscarriages, birth defects, kidney
24 disease, hypertension and autoimmune diseases are more
25 prevalent among people who live closer to mine waste sites; and

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1 WHEREAS, indigenous peoples have a significant and
2 spiritual connection to the land in the Grants mineral belt;
3 and

4 WHEREAS, residents of the Grants mineral belt continue to
5 be negatively impacted by past uranium mining and the continued
6 legacy of contamination;

7 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF
8 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the department
9 of health be requested to compile health data from existing
10 environmental sources such as state and federal agencies,
11 university research institutions, advocacy organizations,
12 nonprofit environmental health organizations and state and
13 federal research institutes to develop a health profile of
14 communities within the Grants mineral belt, which would
15 establish a baseline of the current health of communities in
16 which mining and milling activities have been and may be
17 permitted by the mining commission; and

18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the health profile indicate
19 levels or rates of cancer, birth defects, mental health
20 problems and other maladies that health experts have associated
21 with mining and milling activities; and

22 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department of health
23 propose to the mining commission and the department of
24 environment conditions on mining permits that could mitigate
25 the health consequences of mining and milling and help

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1 alleviate the continuing consequences of historical mining; and
2 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
3 transmitted to the secretary of health; the secretary of
4 environment; the secretary of energy, minerals and natural
5 resources; the chair of the mining commission; the governor;
6 the chair of the United States nuclear regulatory commission;
7 the administrators for regions 6 and 9 of the United States
8 environmental protection agency; the regional forester,
9 southwestern region, United States forest service; and the New
10 Mexico congressional delegation.