

## TESTIMONY OF LARRY KING

Good morning honorable members of this Committee and honorable Chairman Waxman.

My name is Larry J. King. I am fifty years old. In the Navajo clan system Edith Hood, sitting here at the table with me, is my sister. I was born and have lived all of my life in a traditional Navajo community called Church Rock Chapter, which is located a few miles northeast of Gallup, New Mexico. In the Church Rock area, we raise sheep and cattle in the traditional Navajo way. I still raise cattle on the land my father left to me and my two sisters.

Between 1975 and 1983, I worked for United Nuclear Corporation (UNC) as an underground mine surveyor mill worker. I am currently employed as a water system technician. I have been active for my community on uranium issues for the last ten years.

Church Rock and its neighboring communities of Pinedale, Coyote Canyon and Iyanbito have suffered widespread impacts of past uranium mining. As you've already heard, the biggest spill of radioactive wastes in United States history occurred in our community on July 16, 1979 — only about two miles from where I live. The contaminated fluids that escaped from the UNC uranium mill tailings pond ran right through our property, in the Puerco River, where we watered our livestock. I remember the foul odor and yellowish color of the fluids. I remember that an elderly woman was burned on her feet from the acid in the fluid when she waded into the stream while herding her sheep. Many years later, when water lines were being installed in the bed of the Puerco, I noticed the same odor and color in a layer about eight feet below the stream bed. To this day, I don't believe that contamination from the spill has gone away.

Our community also continues to suffer from the poisons left from the mining operations that began in the early 1950s. There are about 20 abandoned uranium facilities in the Church Rock area. More than half of those were developed by companies that sold uranium ore to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission for use in the nation's nuclear weapons program, and have not been cleaned up.

I think many of us knew in our hearts that we lived in a contaminated area. But it wasn't until 2003 when the Chapter started the Church Rock Uranium Monitoring Project, or CRUMP, that we found out how bad the problem was, and still is. With the assistance of many outside organizations and agencies, we sampled our air, water, and land. I submit for your record a copy of a recent PowerPoint presentation that summarizes many of the CRUMP findings. Let me tell you about just two of them in the time I have today.

The first is that the Old Churchrock Mine, which is located within one-quarter mile of my home and the homes of my two sisters, remains highly contaminated and has never been properly cleaned up. In the CRUMP survey, which I was trained for and participated in, we found high levels of gamma radiation — up to 16 times what is considered normal for the area — outside of mine site, even on my grazing land, which is immediately adjacent of the mine.

The Old Churchrock Mine was once operated by Phillips Petroleum Company and UNC. It is now occupied by Hydro Resources, Inc. (HRI), which has received a Nuclear Regulatory Commission license to build and operate a uranium in situ leach mine there. Two years ago, the NRC ruled that radiation from the site doesn't have to be included in public dose calculations, that the wastes there are now part of "background,"

as if the Great Spirits had placed them there from the beginning of time. NRC said it doesn't regulate *mine* wastes. I guess its mandate to protect the public health and safety just doesn't apply to we Navajos.

The second major finding of our CRUMP study was that soils around some of the homes of my relatives in the Red Water Pond Road area, where Edith Hood lives, were also contaminated with high gamma radiation levels and with uranium in amounts up to thirty times what is considered natural. Two abandoned mines lie on both sides of this community. One, the Northeast Churchrock Mine, was operated by UNC and is now owned by General Electric Company. A Navajo residence is 500 feet away.

As Edith Hood will tell you in her testimony, there is much sickness among the residents of her community — cancers, kidney disease, miscarriages. We believe that all these illnesses are related to the past mining and milling operations, but it's difficult to prove because no comprehensive health study has even been done in our community.

My own family suffered during the uranium era. One of my uncles and his in-laws were killed when their car collided with a uranium ore truck on State Highway 566 about a mile south of the UNC mill in 1975. Two years later, my brother was killed in a head-on collision with a uranium ore truck at the gate to the Old Churchrock Mine.

As a former underground mine surveyor for UNC, I often worry about my own health. I am not and never have been a smoker, but in the past year, I have developed breathing difficulties. My doctors can't find anything wrong with me — yet. I don't have enough time to tell you how bad the conditions were for the workers at UNC and how the company was not concerned about the safety of its employees. I will tell you

that as a kid, I played on the big piles of ore and mine waste across the road from our home, unaware of the dangers.

On behalf of my community and my family, I beg that you do something to end this horrible experiment that the nuclear industry and the United States government have been carrying out on the health of the Navajo people. I beg you to support our Navajo law and order the NRC to deny permits to companies that want to mine uranium in Navajo communities again. Many of elderly do not speak English, but we all know that what is happening is wrong. Please help us see that justice is done for our people and our communities.