

TESTIMONY OF PHIL HARRISON

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

My name is Phil Harrison. I'm fifty years old, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, a veteran of the United States Armed Forces and an elected delegate to the Navajo Nation Council. I am not here today as an official representative of the Navajo government. I'm here as a private citizen, a proud citizen of the Navajo Nation, a proud citizen of the State of Arizona and a proud citizen of the United States of America.

I'm here to tell a story. In one sense it's my story. But, in a broader sense it's the story of my people. I'm also here to look forward, not backward, and to tell you what I think needs to be done to assist my people and my land in recovering from the devastation caused by short-sighted, and, in some cases, mean spirited people who put their own private interests first and ignored the fact that their choices and decisions would result in an inhumane experiment being conducted on an indigenous people.

I grew up in uranium mining camps. I drank uranium contaminated water from those mines. We washed our clothes in uranium contaminated water. I watched children going into the mines and playing on the waste piles. We made our coffee with the uranium contaminated water. In all likelihood I've continued to drink uranium contaminated water through the years.

There were two wells in Cove Arizona near where I live. Both tested positive for uranium and other radio nuclides. One of the wells was closed by IHS but with the other all they did was blend the water with water from another source and tell us the problem was solved. My father started working in the uranium mines in about 1950. I worked in

a uranium mine in the summer of 1969. I saw cisterns in the mines and watched miners drink three or four cups a day of water from the mine.

My little brother, Herman James Harrison, died of a stomach ailment at the age of six months. He drank the uranium contaminated water. Please realize when I tell you about uranium contaminated water we're not just talking about a situation that occurred thirty, forty or fifty years ago. We're talking about a situation that is occurring today in places like Tuba City, Arizona and other places throughout Navajo Indian Country. The experiment on our health and welfare, being conducted with the complicity of the United States government, continues. We are an indigenous people. We raise sheep and cattle. We drink water where we find it and the sad story is that there is, in all likelihood, plenty of uranium contaminated water to be found on our land. I know many people suffering from kidney problems and I wonder if they're drinking uranium contaminated water.

The Navajo people revere Mother Earth (land) as sacred within a highly spiritual context. So, when uranium mining occurs, it's considered ripping out the guts of Mother Earth. For the Navajo people, sacred sites are the foundation of all our beliefs and practices (communing with higher spiritual powers) because they represent the presence of the sacredness in our lives. It properly informs us that we are not greater than nature and that we have a responsibility to the rest of the natural world that transcends beyond our mere human desires. The more we destroy our planetary nest, we shall have to learn a bitter lesson in the future.

My father died of lung cancer in 1971 at the age of 46. My cousin's father, also a mine worker, died of lung cancer at the age of 42. All of my brothers and sisters have thyroid problems and disorders. They didn't work in the mines but they grew up in areas

contaminated by the mine wastes. I have scarring on my left lung. In 1999 my kidneys failed and I was on dialysis until 2001 when I received a kidney transplant from my sister. My story is not unusual. I only worked in the mines for a few months but I've lived in a uranium mine waste contaminated land all my life. This is the story of my people, a people whose patriotism and loyalty to the United States of America is unparalleled. Code Talkers are finally being recognized in the movies and the newspapers for the heroes that they were. Yet, I've known some of these very Code Talkers who have suffered and died from diseases caused by this continuing experiment on my people. When will this experiment end?

I don't know what will happen next to me. I suffer from a skin disorder that I've been told is connected with exposure to uranium contaminated substances. I don't know what, if anything, will happen as a result of the scarring on my lung. I consider myself to be very lucky to be here today and, in one sense, I consider myself to be in great shape for the shape I'm in.

Having said all this I believe that I lead my life looking forward, not backward. You have the power to change things. You have the power to end this tragic experiment. Here are some of the steps that you can take, starting today to bring life in what we call Diné Bikeyeah back into harmony, and harmony, or hozho, is perhaps the most central concept in our view of the world.

You can support the proposed amendments to RECA as set forth in an exhibit to be submitted with my testimony. You can remove illogical barriers to the provisions of compensation to former Navajo uranium workers and their families. For sixty five years since 1942, Navajo men, woman and children have been subjected to the catastrophic

effects of exposure to uranium mining milling, and the effects of downwind exposure to nuclear test sites. This has benefited the United States, but has been a tragedy to the Navajo Spirit. It is TOO late to help those like my father who have died from this devious exposure. Apologies are appreciated, however an apology is hollow without just compensation. Please change the laws to allow justice for the Navajo people. You can also support the measures set forth in the testimony of Resources Committee Chairman George Arthur.

It's been about twenty-five years since the last mines closed. My people shouldn't have to wait another twenty-five years for the federal government to accept a responsibility that it should have accepted many years ago.