



Archdiocese of Santa Fe

Office of Communications/Social Media

4000 St. Joseph's Pl NW | Albuquerque, NM 87120-1714

Leslie M. Radigan, Director

505.831.8180 | LRadigan@asfnm.org

archdiosf.org

ARCHBISHOP JOHN C. WESTER'S STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF TRINITY TEST DOWNWINDERS AND URGES PASSAGE OF THE RADIATION EXPOSURE COMPENSATION ACT

ALBUQUERQUE, NM – Monday, March 18, 2024– IMMEDIATE RELEASE – The following is a message from Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe, and Anne Avellone, Director, Office of Social Justice and Respect Life and Archdiocese of Santa Fe Justice, Peace, and Life Commission:

“Oppenheimer,” a movie released in 2023, many parts of which were filmed in New Mexico, is an expansive biopic of the life of Robert Oppenheimer and his work developing the first atomic bomb at Los Alamos, NM and detonating it in the Tularosa Basin at the Trinity site. On March 10, 2024, the movie received seven Academy Awards, including for Best Picture. We are grateful the movie raises awareness of the life and work of Robert Oppenheimer and, in doing so, brings to new audiences an awareness of the development of the atomic bomb and its perils.

However, we recognize the very real and lasting impact of the development and testing of the atomic bomb has had serious and often deadly health impacts on the people of New Mexico and throughout the country. People like uranium miners and the Downwinders of New Mexico are unwitting victims who had no choice in being exposed to radiation. It is unfortunate that such a remarkable and timely film does not acknowledge these realities.

The very same week “Oppenheimer” received so many accolades in the motion picture world, the U.S. Senate passed by a vote of 69 to 30 a bipartisan reauthorization of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), which compensates people who have had health issues due to radiation exposure from the atomic testing and uranium mining. This bill expands previous bills to include compensation to communities in regions of Nevada, Utah, and Arizona which are currently not covered by RECA, and for the first time covers New Mexico (to include those downwind of the Trinity test site), Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Guam, and parts of Alaska, Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee, as well as uranium miners exposed between 1971 and 1990. We thank the sponsors of the bill, Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), and Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO), for their work passing this bill. Now the bill goes to the House, where we urge its passage so families who struggle with devastating cancers and chronic health issues directly related to mining and testing will receive long overdue acknowledgment and financial support.

Contact U.S. Congressman [Mike Johnson](#), Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, to pass the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, just as the Senate did on March 7, 2024. Call 202.225.2777.

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