

# *Senate panel asked to compensate Natives for radiation damage*

A U.S. Senate Subcommittee began hearings in Washington today on a bill proposed to compensate U.S. citizens for radiation damage suffered by uranium miners and nuclear testing, and heard a request that Eskimos and other Alaska Natives be included for study and possible compensation under the legislation.

The bill, S. 1865, was introduced by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, D - Massachusetts, Subcommittee Chairman and by ten other senators. The bill would make the U.S. liable for damages suffered by the miners and provide for compensation to be paid to individuals who were harmed by U.S. nuclear weapons testing programs. S. 1865 would also provide for liability for damages to "certain sheep herds." A researcher for the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) asked the subcommittee to include Eskimos and other Alaska Natives for studies and possible compensation for damages caused by radiation exposure.

Theresa Pederson, Inupiat Eskimo from Council, Alaska, told the Senate subcommittee that Eskimos and other Alaska Natives may have been affected by atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons in the 1950's and 1960's and that the Natives may possibly be experiencing some of the effects of such exposure. Studies of cancer rates among Natives, and determination of any link between the disease and Native cancer rates, should be provided and compensation paid if proof can be demonstrated, Pederson said.

Studies conducted in the 1950's through the early 1970's indicated Eskimos had absorbed unusually high amounts of radiation in their bodies from eating native foods of the arctic which contained radioactive materials from fallout of radiation caused by atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons.

"The lethal radioactivity carried by atmospheric air currents well beyond the borders of nations is taking its toll in the Alaskan sub-arctic and arctic regions. The indications are stronger now that a significantly higher proportion of mammalian reproduction, when exposed to radiation, have developed into many forms of cancer," Pederson said.

"The U.S. Senate has been informed of 28 years of scientific investigations into the dangers of radioactive fallout onto and up the arctic foodchain have linked a high per capita rate of various cancers among Eskimos due to the absorption of highly concentrated radionuclides," she said.

Pederson said that evidence has indicated that Eskimos living north of the 64th parallel were particularly exposed to radiation from atmospheric testing as radiation materials are more easily introduced into the foodchain in arctic regions, and the Natives are directly dependent on those food sources.

"The Eskimo believes the evidence demonstrating that peak cancer rates are not reached 30 years after the irradiation, and that bone cancer can occur at least 40 years after irradiation," the Inupiat researcher testified.

Pederson requested that Section 2(e) of the Act, defining "affected areas" in which possible victims are located be amended. The requested amendment would authorize the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare to make the determination to include Eskimos and other Alaska Natives for study and possible compensation for damages caused by radiation exposure.

Pederson told the Tundra Times that such an amendment has been introduced by Senators Kennedy and Hatch and encouraged Natives who have reason to believe they or their families may have been affected by radiation exposure to submit statements to the Subcommittee. The record will remain open until June 21 for statements, which should be sent to Robert Wenger, Chief Counsel, Subcommittee on Health, Scientific and Research, 120 Senate Court Building, 308C, Washington, D.C. 20510, Pederson stated.