

### *Bill to Amend SMCRA Passes House Natural Resources Committee*

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico’s Third District led the effort today in the House Natural Resources Committee to pass legislation that would assist with the clean-up of abandoned uranium mines in New Mexico. The committee passed S. 897, introduced by Senator Jeff Bingaman in the Senate, which amends the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA) to allow New Mexico, tribes, and other states to use federal funding to clean up uranium mines.

“New Mexico has a long history of contributing to our country’s national security. During World War II and the Cold War, the mining and processing of uranium was conducted in many areas across the state,” Congressman Luján said. “Today, the legacy of abandoned uranium mines has negatively impacted public health, public safety, and environmental health for generations of New Mexicans, especially those in minority and tribal communities. This important bill will provide New Mexico with a vital opportunity to tap into critical funding to clean up abandoned uranium mines. Now that we have taken this step forward to pass the bill out of committee, I urge House Republican leaders to bring this bill to the floor without delay and pass it without amendment so we can get it to the President’s desk.”

In 1977, the SMACRA bill established the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) fund to address the reclamation and restoration of areas affected by mining. The fund is derived from a reclamation fee on coal produced underground and surface coal mining. Under the existing AML program, each state receives a share of the AML fund, but is restricted from using the funds to clean up non-coal mines. As a result, New Mexico has not been able to use the funds to address the critical need to clean up uranium mines.

This legislation amends SMCRA to clarify that uncertified states, like New Mexico, and Indian tribes have the authority to use AML resources for non-coal cleanup, opening the door for New Mexico to put these funds to use cleaning up abandoned uranium mines. S.897 passed with unanimous support in the Senate in November of 2011.

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