

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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### Ranking Member Cori Bush

#### Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs

#### Hearing on “The Next Generation: Empowering American Nuclear Energy”

#### January 18, 2024

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**St. Louis and I are here today to express our grave concerns about the devastating impact nuclear waste has had on this nation—especially Black and Brown communities. We cannot talk about expanding nuclear energy in this country without first dealing with the federal government’s continuing legacy of failing to properly remediate harmful nuclear waste in communities like mine.**

In St. Louis, nuclear contamination dates back to 1942 when, as part of the Manhattan Project, the federal government hired Mallinckrodt Chemical Works to process uranium in the heart of what is now my District—in downtown St. Louis. The processing resulted in dangerous radioactive waste getting recklessly stored aboveground near the St. Louis Airport for decades. Near the airport is a waterway central to our community called Coldwater Creek, which sprawls across residential areas, schools, businesses, and parks affecting areas in North St. Louis County.

The improper storage of radioactive waste at this site persisted unchecked for decades. The material was left in the open, exposed to the rain and wind. This callous mishandling of deadly waste allowed it to seep into the ground, contaminating Coldwater Creek as well as the soil and waterways in the surrounding communities.

Though I didn’t live right on the creek, I was told that during heavy rainfall the water from the creek may have flooded my basement. My mom actually lived near Coldwater Creek, and so my kids would play out there when they were visiting her. Not only did we not know how dangerous it was—we didn’t even know it was contaminated at all. We had no reason to suspect, or any warning at all, that the creek could pose a possible risk to our health.

After many years of neglect, the federal government sold the waste to Cotter Corporation for further for-profit processing, which moved it about half a mile North. What Cotter couldn’t use to make money was illegally dumped in a nearby public landfill called West Lake Landfill. Such heartless and negligent action was a clear violation of federal law and common decency. As a result, radioactive waste remains both in Coldwater Creek and at the West Lake Landfill—poisoning our communities to this day.

**In a shocking revelation, records released last July proved that the federal government both hid and downplayed the risks of this radioactive waste in St. Louis for nearly 75 years, and that radioactive waste was known to pose a threat to people living near Coldwater Creek as early as 1949. Despite this knowledge, however, federal officials repeatedly downplayed these risks as “slight,” “minimal,” or “low-level.” People in my District who were unknowingly exposed to this radiation are now living with serious chronic health conditions, including several types of rare cancers.**

In 2014 the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services did an analysis of people living in the eight zip codes around Coldwater Creek and West Lake Landfill. The report found breast, colon, prostate, kidney and bladder cancer cases in the area were significantly higher than average. Just to give one specific and chilling example—the Department of Health report found brain and other nervous system cancers were 300 percent more likely to be found in children (age 17 or younger) living in the zip code closest to West Lake.

It was not until 2016—67 years later—that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finally began advising the community to avoid Coldwater Creek entirely.

To this day people in my District continue to allow their children to play in Coldwater Creek because they still aren't aware it's contaminated. There are no signs to indicate any danger or to properly warn folks of the high contamination levels in the creek. That's why I am currently working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency to put up this urgently needed signage.

The federal government still has not provided Missourians any funding to help families test their homes, their businesses, or their schools to ensure they are not living with, and sending their children to school in a place with unhealthy levels of radiation. As this toxic waste continues to devastate my community, neither the federal government nor the private sector contractors who reaped profits from their shoddy work have provided financial compensation to the victims of the Manhattan Project in St. Louis.

In 2022, Jana Elementary School in Florissant, Missouri, was shuttered after privately conducted testing revealed radiation levels that were 22 times higher than normal, healthy levels. They were found in the classrooms, the cafeteria, and the playground. My constituents were—again—unknowingly sending their children every day to a school that was exposing them to dangerously high levels of radiation.

**All of this was substantiated in a recent GAO report I requested, along with Ranking Member Raskin, which confirms what we've been saying for years. I ask unanimous consent to enter this report into the record, which finds the federal government has failed to remediate these two sites in St. Louis, and many others like them in communities across our country. The GAO report also finds that the St. Louis sites with Manhattan Project waste are found near the most underserved communities of any of the remediation sites around the country.**

Mr. Chairman, I wrote to you in October requesting a field hearing in Missouri's First District to investigate this ongoing environmental catastrophe and hear directly from Missourians whose lives and families have suffered the grievous effects of this preventable health crisis. I would like to renew my request for a field hearing here and now. This shameful legacy of negligence and lies has hurt so many people in St. Louis and they continue to suffer today.

**Action needs to be taken to remediate the damage that we have already done before we start talking about expanding nuclear energy in this country. We have a responsibility to both fix—and learn from—our mistakes before we risk subjecting any other communities to the same exposure.**

Thank you and I yield back.

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