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## Gallup: Study shows working families struggle to buy homes

By Shaquana Desiderio  
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GALLUP — Gallup Housing Authority Executive Director Richard Kontz and researcher Brittany Babycos presented findings from a new study showing a significant affordability gap for working families trying to buy homes in the city.

Gallup Housing Authority Executive Director Richard Kontz explained that the presentation was part of his broader effort to address affordable housing and support families currently living in public housing who wish to become homeowners.

“You’re aware of my homeowner-ship project,” he said. “We built eight houses here to try to provide an opportunity for what we call ‘over-income folks’ in public housing an opportunity to purchase a home.”

He said part of the project funding came from a state grant intended for affordable housing. The funds, which were donated to the City of Gallup, are intended to provide down payment and closing cost assistance to qualifying families.

However, Kontz said that when speaking with the city attorney, he was asked whether there was actual proof of an affordability issue in Gallup.



Richard Kontz

“He says, ‘Has there been any study done by the state or MFA (New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority) that proves there’s an affordability problem here in Gallup?’ And I said, ‘MFA has done a little bit of stuff like that...but I can’t point to one that points at Gallup.’”

### Study conducted

In response, Kontz hired Brittany Babycos, founder and executive director of BRC Research Management LLC, to conduct a detailed study.

“I’m really excited to talk about the Affordable Housing Gap Analysis,” Babycos told the

council. “We were interested in identifying any barriers that really prevent working families from being able to move into their own home.”

The study focused on households earning between \$55,000 and \$103,000 annually — roughly 81% to 100% of the area’s median income. Through interviews with local realtors and lenders, the study uncovered major challenges, including the high cost of available homes, lack of savings for down payments, and widespread credit issues.

As of April 2025, only 26 homes were listed for sale in Gallup, and just four were under \$200,000. Most of those, Babycos said, re-

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## County hears more about hazard mitigation

By Dana Martinez  
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GALLUP — McKinley County Commissioners got a more detailed look at the McKinley County Office of Emergency Management’s Multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan in a presen-

## Pass the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act



## MMDR focuses on amending Criminal Code

By Jody Wilson  
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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Taskforce had a meeting about proposed amendments to Title 14 and Title 17 of Navajo Nation law, focusing on updating criminal statutes to better protect Navajo community members, particularly addressing issues related to sexual assault, child abuse, domestic violence, and other criminal offenses.

Office of the Prosecutor Major Crimes Unit Kevin C. Barnett, Esq., presented proposed changes to improve legal definitions, extend statute of limitations, create new criminal offenses, and strengthen existing laws to provide more comprehensive protection for victims, especially children and women.

Barnett discussed the need for prosecutors to be authorized to appear in federal court to assist in federal

be performing a five-year update.

OEM Emergency Manager Adam Berry focused on the planning effort with SWCA Environmental Consultants.

The hazard mitigation plan addresses how the county, City of Gallup and Gallup McKinley County Schools will handle natural hazards that impact each community. The process has the entities analyze the risks and prioritize action that can be taken, such as hazardous fuels reduction like wildfire thinning, drainage improvements, erosion control and public outreach.

## Risk management

Berry expanded on the collaborative efforts of the OEM and SWCA in last week's meeting. The OEM has been working with SWCA for around three months so far.

"Mitigation and emergency management is essentially lessening the risk when something bad happens," said Berry. "So this mitigation [plan] reduces injury and property damage by lessening the impact of the natural disasters. [The plan] reduces the impact of natural disasters by supporting protection and prevention activities, which are an ongoing part of preparedness."

Berry explained that lessening the impact of natural disasters means quickening emergency response times. He used an example, stating "say we're going into monsoon season. We've got a lot of flooding, we have areas that are flood prone that could block roads and would hinder emergency response. If we have mitigation efforts in place it should lessen the flood to the point where public safety can get where they need to go."

Berry further remarked, "It speeds recovery; if we lessen the impact on things it shouldn't take long for us to recover, and that creates

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AP photo/Jose Luis Magana, file  
Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., speaks about the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, Sept. 24.

# US Senate seeks to add expanded compensation for nuclear radiation victims to tax bill

By Michael Phillips  
and Mary Claire Jalonick  
Associated Press

**W**ASHINGTON — A program to compensate people exposed to radiation from past nuclear weapons testing and manufacturing could be restarted and expanded under a provision added by U.S. senators to the major tax and budget policy bill.

The language added Thursday to the Senate version of the massive tax bill would overhaul the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, which was originally enacted in 1990 and expired about a year ago. The law compensated people

in about a dozen western states who developed serious illnesses from nuclear testing and manufacturing stemming from World War II-era efforts to develop the atomic bomb.

## Expanding coverage

The new Senate provision

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AP photo/Jose Luis Magana, file  
A member of the Navajo Nation holds a banner during a news conference about the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act on Capitol Hill in Washington, Sept. 24.



Title 14 is being updated, with three main areas being addressed: the DUI statute, the vehicular homicide statute of limitations, and the misrepresentation of Navajo produced goods.

The DUI statute has not been updated since the late 1980s, and there are internal contradictions in the sentences for second-time offenders. The vehicular homicide statute of limitations was proposed to be raised from three years to six years, and a special provision is being written for cross-commissioned troopers.

Barnett outlined the statute of limitations for various crimes under Title 17, including intentional killing, forgery, and rape of a Navajo child.

"The statute of limitations for the intentional killing of another Navajo or of another person is three years. Statute of limitations for forgery is 10 years minimum. The statute of limitations for raping a 10-year-old Navajo child is three years; the statute of limitations for obtaining a signature by deception is 10 years minimum," said Barnett. "We are hoping to mandate one year in jail, mandatory \$5,000 fine for murder," said Barnett. "The

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# Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission to tour eastern agency abandoned mines

By Vida Volkert  
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**CROWNPOINT** — The Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission will hold its regular meeting on eastern abandoned uranium mines at the Thoreau Chapter House at 10 a.m. Thursday,

June 26. The meeting is open to the public.

After the meeting, commissioners plan to tour the eastern abandoned uranium mine region on June 27.

The Commission consists of members from each of the six abandoned uranium mine regions; among them are former council

delegate and vice president of Becenti Chapter Jonathan Perry, social worker and former president of Forest Lake Chapter Mae-Gilene Begay, former Cameron Chapter secretary Mable Franklin, Diné College Environmental Institute Research and Outreach senior researcher from Beclabito Perry Charley and Diné activist and

former board member of the NM Environmental Law Center from Becenti Chapter Leona Morgan.

The purpose of the commission is to study and reach conclusions about the impacts of uranium mining and uranium processing on the Navajo Nation. The commission will also make recommendations to the president of the Navajo Nation

and to the Navajo Nation Council for policies, laws and regulations to address those impacts.

U.S. EPA has been working with Navajo Nation authorities and the public on remediation options for more than 500 abandoned mines

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penalizes many more people, but at a far lower cost than previous legislation. "These folks deserve to be recognized for the sacrifices they made and compensated when the government has poisoned them without telling them, without helping them, without making it right," Hawley said Friday. "This is a chance, finally, to make it right."

Still, the new provision's pathway remains uncertain when the House considers the Senate's changes. While there is broad Senate support for the payments, it is unclear how the addition of Hawley's legislation will be received by cost-conscious Republicans as they barrel toward a self-imposed July 4 deadline for the overall tax bill. House leaders are waiting to see what comes out of the Senate before deciding whether they might make further changes or simply try to pass the Senate bill and send it to President Donald Trump's desk.

## Lingering effects in Missouri

St. Louis played a key role processing uranium as the United States developed a nuclear weapons program



In this undated courtesy photo, Navajo Nation President stands alongside longtime advocate Maggie Billman of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act in Washington, D.C. Speaker of the Navajo Nation Council Crystalyn Curley is also present and can be seen to the far right.

Courtesy/OPVP

that was vital for winning World War II. But that effort exposed workers and nearby residents to radiation, with lingering issues remaining to this day. An elementary school was closed down a few years ago because of radioactive material found on site. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers remains years away from finishing environmental cleanup work.

An investigation by The Associated Press, The Missouri Independent and MuckRock found the federal government and companies responsible for nuclear bomb production and atomic waste storage sites in the St. Louis area in the mid-20th century were aware of health risks, spills, improperly stored contaminants and other problems but

often ignored them.

Nuclear waste contaminated Coldwater Creek, and those who live nearby worry their cancers and other severe illnesses are connected. It's difficult to definitively link specific illnesses with the waste, but advocates for an expanded compensation program said there's evidence it made people sick years later.

After the report by the AP and others, Hawley said sick St. Louis residents deserved help, too. He was joined by Dawn Chapman, co-founder of Just Moms STL, which brought attention to local nuclear contamination. She has called St. Louis a "national sacrifice zone." "Many of us have had extreme

water, crops and livestock. Attention for these "downwinders" rose following the release of the film Oppenheimer.

"Our federal government has a moral responsibility to support Americans that helped defend our country — and it has a moral responsibility to include all people who were exposed. That begins with reauthorizing RECA and amending it to include those who have been left out for far too long," said Sen. Martin Heinrich, Democrat of New Mexico.

Prior to the addition of the radiation compensation measure, Hawley had so far withheld support for the overall tax package, questioning cuts to Medicaid programs and the potential effects on rural hospitals and low income residents. He said he still wants to see improvements in the package, but added that help for radiation victims was essential.

"It would be very hard for me to vote for a bill that doesn't include (the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act). This is extremely, extremely important to me," Hawley said.

## Hazard mitigation

Continued from Page 1

a better and more prepared and resilient community. It gives our communities — our citizens — some balance to be able to get back to some kind of sense of normalcy in a quicker manner."

### Details

The plan will include data for hazard occurrences since 2020, including mapped hazards, a vulnerability analysis, extreme temperature analysis and changing weather patterns.

The plan includes space for governing body introduction and adoption presentations with opportunity for input from the public. There will be an in-person open house in early fall.

The top hazards for the plan so far are dam failure, winter storms, severe wind, drought, extreme temperatures for heat and cold, wildfire,

thunderstorms that include lightning and hail and flooding.

Berry noted that there is research still being done, so the top hazards may change slightly.

Berry explained the area doesn't have any major dams but that FEMA highly encourages the inclusion of any dams in hazard mitigation plans.

The former plan, adopted in 2021, met all federal requirements. It expires in February 2026. Berry noted the 2021 plan was the first time any school district participated in a hazard mitigation plan, and the plan will continue to include the GMCS district.

The plan was developed in 2020 and identified 8 natural hazards that were profiled in the plan.

### Further information

Berry mentioned the process and players. The main planning team is made of

members from the three participating entities: the county, the city and the school district. There is a primary point of contact for each entity, the team provides feedback on approach and process, provides data, edits and feedback on the plan and provides reference materials.

Subject matter experts are brought in to help with planning whenever needed. Some examples are the inclusion of the National Weather Service and U.S. Forest Service. The plan also makes efforts to include stakeholders and community members. Stakeholders are defined as interested entities who are not on the planning team and not an individual community member; examples include local and regional planning authorities, agencies that regulate development, academia, businesses, non-profit organizations and neighboring communities.

Berry specified that the Na-

vajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo are considered stakeholders and they each have their own hazard mitigation plans.

Community members are defined as residents, property owners, and business owners who are invited to provide input based on local knowledge and community interests.

### Participation

Commission Chair Robert Baca asked Berry about each entity's level of participation. Baca recalled a past planning committee that had difficulty getting the participation that was needed from each party. He stated one problem that occurred was getting a second contact person behind a primary contact person.

He asked if Berry was getting the cooperation and information. Berry replied that they had their second planning meeting last week, and reported that there were several individuals from various county,

city and school district teams.

"We've had great participation, especially compared to our last planning process that happened during COVID," Berry added.

The planning process began in April and is expected to be completed in March 2026. The planning team will meet from May to August and will have public and stakeholder involvement throughout. A hazard profile and vulnerability analysis is scheduled for July, a mitigation strategy will be in September. A public comment draft will be released in October; November and December will see the plan reviewed by state agencies and FEMA. Local adoption of the plan is scheduled for February and March 2026.

A hazard mitigation plan is required by the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) in order for the county to be eligible to apply for grant funding.

## More details

The child support statute is being proposed to address the failure to pay child support, with a mandatory 30-day jail sentence for those who go 120 consecutive days without making a payment.

Barnett discussed the need for a strangulation or suffocation statute, as strangulation is a lethal method of violence often committed by men against women. He proposed a mandatory 180 days jail for strangulation and 365 days jail for strangling an intimate partner. He also proposed 365 days in jail and a \$5,000 fine for strangling a minor under 12.

Barnett proposed rape shield provisions including limit attacking victim's sexual history in court, clarifying that multiple sexual partners doesn't imply consent. He also suggested removing the spousal rape exemption. He proposed 14 days jail for resisting arrest.

## Animal cruelty

Barnett proposed a statute for animal cruelty to prevent unnecessary animal suffering while respecting traditional Navajo practices. There was discussion about creating a new statute for possession of drug paraphernalia because the Navajo Nation does not currently have one.

Barnett also highlighted the importance of overhauling the family member definition under the Violence Against Family Act to include foster children and foster parents.

The rationale behind these proposed changes is to allow more time to investigate and prosecute serious crimes and address challenges in collecting evidence. It would provide better justice for victims, especially children and eliminate time constraints that prevent prosecution of serious offenses.

The meeting involved multiple stakeholders, including members of the MMDR Taskforce, Navajo Nation Prosecutors, The Navajo Nation's Public Defenders Office, Victim Advocates and Federal Partners. Survivors and advocates strongly supported the proposed changes, emphasizing the urgent need to protect Navajo families and children. The meeting concluded with a prayer and commitment to continue collaborative efforts to improve the legal system.

## Uranium commission

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on the Navajo Nation. Several meetings and a public hearing were conducted in the last two years on plans to clean up various mines on the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation, including an abandoned mine in the Churchock area.

USEPA plans to transfer uranium waste from the Churchock mine to the landfill in Thorau; however, they have encountered opposition from local Diné communities around the landfill who do not want their backyard to become a uranium waste dump.

**Information:**  
Uranium Commission Office, 928-318-4990

ces that claim support for actions and other things ears. There have been the Revolutionary Guard k Iran's nuclear weapons force alone is unlikely and replace it with at peace with Israel.

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