

BRIAN HIGGINS
27TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT REVENUE
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TASK FORCE
CO-CHAIR

GREAT LAKES TASK FORCE

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3227

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
431 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3306
(202) 226-0347 (FAX)

WESTERN NEW YORK OFFICES:
LARKIN BUILDING
726 EXCHANGE STREET
SUITE 601
BUFFALO, NY 14210
(716) 852-3501
(716) 852-3929 (FAX)
FENTON BUILDING
2 EAST 2ND STREET
SUITE 300
JAMESTOWN, NY 14701
(716) 484-0729
(716) 484-1049 (FAX)
higgins.house.gov

To Dr. Melius and the Advisory Board on Radiation and Worker Health:

I regret the House of Representatives Washington, DC vote schedule prevents me from being with you in person to speak in solidarity with those who served this nation as Bethlehem Steel employees. Today I continue to advocate in strong support of the Special Exposure Cohort application of the Bethlehem Steel retirees and their families that sits before your panel.

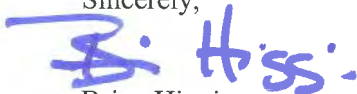
Local steelworkers and their families have suffered for decades from the toxic exposure to uranium dust at the former Bethlehem Steel plant in Lackawanna, New York. I wish I could say that the supervisors at Bethlehem didn't fully know the risk that their workers in the uranium rolling facility were being subjected to in those early years of the Cold War. But in fact, huge gaps of monitoring data for the facility mean we will never really know whether proper precautions were carried out, and carried out well. In addition, as reports have suggested, there are major inadequacies in attempts to use surrogate data to reconstruct this toxic exposure.

Without a doubt, though, we do know the toll that these workers have paid from the toxic exposure has cost many lives and resulted in significant suffering for families and friends. These employees have suffered from gruesome cancers, and have had their lives cut short tragically. The workers, and their survivors, deserve to receive a fair benefit from the program that was established to help them. You, the Advisory Board, have a crucial opportunity to dignify their service to this country and their memory by recommending these workers be placed in a Special Exposure Cohort. I sincerely hope you rise to the challenge.

The late Ed Walker made this issue the cause of his life. He knew more about the intricacies of these facilities than most, and he knew, before many others would admit, that the system set up to deal with the Bethlehem Steel workers was painfully flawed and needed to be fixed. That's why he led the effort for Bethlehem Steel workers to be placed in a Special Exposure Cohort. His memory lives on today, with his wife, Joyce, and the dozens of local families who have come to express their support for fair relief. As you deliberate, I urge you to reflect on their concerns and the fallacies of the system they have been subjected to and make a favorable recommendation for their petition.

Thank you for agreeing to our request for an Advisory Board meeting in Western New York. I am heartened to see that the Board has taken up this issue in earnest, this has been a long fight for us and I am extremely hopeful that the panel will recommend that the Special Exposure Cohort status be granted for these workers at your meeting this week. Over the last 5 years, since I first came to serve in Congress, I have been touched by the personal stories I have heard week after week and frustrated by the bureaucratic roadblocks these families have faced. I appreciate your consideration and time. It is truly my honor to advocate on behalf of these Cold War heroes.

Sincerely,



Brian Higgins
Member of Congress (NY-27)