



**COLORADO**  
Department of Public  
Health & Environment

United States Senate  
Committee on Energy & Natural Resources  
304 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

March 2, 2026

Dear Honorable Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources:

On behalf of the State of Colorado, I am writing to express the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's strong support for federal legislation to reauthorize the U.S. Department of Energy to operate the Cheney Disposal Cell in Grand Junction, Colorado beyond its current expiration date of September 30, 2031. Extending this authorization is critical to protecting public health, maintaining environmental safety, and avoiding prohibitive costs for the State of Colorado.

The need for this facility stems from the legacy of uranium milling in the region. Between 1950 and 1970, the Climax uranium mill produced approximately 2.2 million tons of radioactive tailings. Before the health risks were understood, these sandy tailings were widely used as construction fill for homes, businesses, and infrastructure throughout Mesa County and the Western Slope of Colorado. These tailings emit radon gas and gamma radiation, which pose significant health risks when trapped inside or near structures. As local governments and private owners across the Western Slope develop land, they continue to encounter this radioactive waste that must be managed safely.

The Cheney Disposal Cell is the only facility in Colorado authorized to receive this radioactive waste. However, the Department of Energy's authority to operate the disposal site expires on September 30, 2031, which would necessitate activities to initiate the closure of the disposal site later in 2026. Currently, the site contains approximately 4.5 million cubic yards of low-level radioactive waste. It has the capacity to accept an estimated 220,000 additional cubic yards of material, which translates to a remaining operational life of approximately 75 years based on historical volumes.

Allowing the facility to close while it still has capacity would have severe economic and environmental consequences for Colorado. The Department of Energy spends approximately \$2 million during years when it opens the site to receive and place material. Without the Cheney facility, the nearest alternative is the Clive Disposal Site in Utah. The cost to dispose of one standard shipment of waste (approximately 6,000 cubic yards) would increase from ~\$100,000 to an estimated \$16 million in disposal fees. Without a local and affordable disposal option, there is risk that radioactive materials would be illegally dumped in open spaces.

This legislation to extend the Department of Energy's authority to operate the Cheney facility ensures that we can manage the long-term legacy of the uranium boom in Western Colorado. We appreciate your leadership and consideration of this important legislation.

My best,

Jill Hunsaker Ryan, MPH  
Executive Director

