

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 13, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

S.1710, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2019, as passed by Congress and signed by the President, includes strong new authorities for the Department of Defense and Air Force to finally address the dire situation in Eastern New Mexico near Cannon Air Force Base. Our constituents there have struggled with elevated levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) chemicals in water from military activities. The concentrations of PFAS detected in the groundwater below Cannon Air Force Base exceeded 26,000 parts per trillion (ppt) which is 371 times greater than the U.S. EPA drinking water health advisory level of 70 ppt. Agricultural activities and dairy operations have been directly and negatively impacted.

For well over a year, the New Mexico delegation has pressed the leadership at the Department of Defense and the Air Force to provide clean water and filtration to our constituents who have seen elevated levels of PFAS in the water that supplies their local dairies. We have also encouraged the Department and Air Force to purchase land in proximity to the Air Force base that has been contaminated as a logical way to improve base security and streamline clean-up efforts.

PFAS chemicals were detected in milk produced by one of the dairies near Cannon Air Force Base, resulting in severe economic impacts there as its owner dumped thousands of gallons of milk in order to prevent human exposure. That dairy is on the verge of bankruptcy. The contaminant plume has affected the water supply for other dairies that have had to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars out of their own pocket to install water filtration and provide monitoring for their livestock. The Air Force is aware that the plume is on the move and without fast decisive action, there will be even worse impacts for the local dairies and residents.

The Air Force is responsible for PFAS contamination in the water at several bases across the country and have been supplying drinking water and filtration to many affected communities. But leadership at the Department of Defense and the Air Force have not pursued similar actions in New Mexico, arguing that the authorities to do so did not exist. With the passage of S.1710 and the complete language of our legislation providing these authorities, we can move past these concerns and bring needed attention to this situation.

These dairies have been very good neighbors to the Air Force. They have previously sold their air rights to the base and have lived in harmony with the base for many years. But this past year, the contamination has been devastating and left them with no options to move forward. Due to the PFAS contamination, the commercial land value for all the neighboring dairies is next to nothing and the owners are struggling to make ends meet.

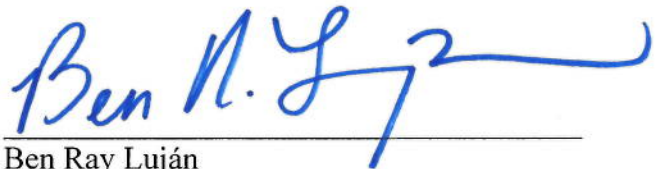
There is now an opportunity for leadership at the Department of Defense and the Air Force to not only do the right thing to address the negative impact it has had, but also increase the force protection standoff near critical infrastructure and runways that would directly benefit Cannon Air Force base.

We would like to know how you plan to use the new authorities that have been enacted to address this situation as soon as possible. Please let us know by January 23rd what next steps you will take to supply clean water, reimburse filtration expenses that were incurred, and purchase contaminated lands within proximity of the base for the purpose of implementing remediation.

Sincerely



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Ben Ray Luján
United States Representative



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Xochitl Torres Small
United States Representative

cc:

The Honorable Barbara M. Barrett
Secretary of the Air Force