

Pat Sheely's letter ran in the Gallup Independent

## **I support task force and moratorium on uranium mining**

To the editor, I have been a resident of Gallup and McKinley County for 24 years. I attended the McKinley County Board of Commissioners meeting March 14 to participate in the discussion of a moratorium on uranium mining. I also attended the 38th Redwater Pond Road Community commemoration of the uranium tailings spill July 15.

Known as the Churchrock Spill, the disastrous uranium tailings pond dam break July 16, 1979, dumped more than 1,000 tons of solid radioactive waste and some 94 million gallons of radioactive liquid into the Rio Puerco channel, which carried it downstream past Gallup and all the way to Winslow, Arizona. This is the largest radioactive accident in U.S. history. The Redwater Pond Road Community is now a Superfund site. It will be years before it is cleaned up. I wonder how many people in Gallup are aware of this.

Many families have been and continue to be adversely affected by this accident and the uranium mining that has taken place in McKinley County. I have not been able to learn if there were any studies done to determine residual radioactivity levels in the Puerco that flows through Gallup. I do know that current uranium mining technology is water intensive. It will use a lot of our precious water supply, and it will easily contaminate the aquifer as "treated" water is released.

It is my opinion that

it is foolhardy to think that uranium mining is now safe and that we do not need to worry about the contamination that occurred in the past. Our people and our land are our most precious resources. Any argument that we need to leave open the possibility of future uranium mining for economic reasons is putting our county and our communities at risk and is a serious failure in vision and leadership undermining McKinley County's future in renewable solar energy and tourism. This is why I support a moratorium on uranium mining.

If we are unable to support a moratorium, then it is time to begin planning for policies and safeguards in the event that uranium mining returns. When and if it returns, it will be too late. We see this happening in the areas of the state that have allowed hydraulic fracking. There are no policies or plans in place for how to deal with disasters or how to preserve infrastructure such as roads and bridges from degradation.

I hope we can envision a future that will safeguard what is most precious for the life of our children and future generations: clean and safe water, healthy soil, clean air and respect for all species that share their existence with us in this beautiful bioregion of McKinley County. A task force would help us to discuss these issues and to address the concerns of our citizens.

Patricia Sheely Gallup