

FRONT PAGE Bill could benefit Simonds workers

By Scott Leffler
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A provision making its way through Congress could provide government payments of up to \$150,000 in cases where Simonds Saw and Steel workers contracted cancers related to their employment.

The money would be paid out in a lump sum to former workers if they have cancers caused by radioactivity at Simonds or to the surviving relatives of workers who died of cancers caused by the radioactivity, according to Rep. John J. LaFalce, D-Tonawanda.

Also, the provision calls for the government to pay for the medical care of former workers now suffering from Simonds

work-related cancers.

The measure — part of the Defense Authorization Conference Report, which funds the U.S. military — was overwhelmingly approved in the House Wednesday and awaits a vote in the Senate.

It would be funded by a proposed \$250 million appropriation.

The benefits package is formally called the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program, and it would cover 4,000 to 6,000 work-related cancer cases throughout the nation, LaFalce said.

Simonds, in Lockport, was one of 165 plants nationwide that worked with radioactive materials during the early years of the Cold War.

Simonds workers produced billets for nuclear reactor fuel rods.

The work, done between 1948 and 1956, involved rolling 25 million to 35 million pounds of uranium and 30,000 to 40,000 of thorium.

The bill also would extend benefits to covered cancer victims who may die of unrelated causes between the time the bill is signed and the time it takes effect.

LaFalce said, "It is the least we should do. For me, the moral obligation to help was clear and imperative."

He added, "I am pleased that our efforts were successful and that this package has been accepted by all parties involved in the negotiations."

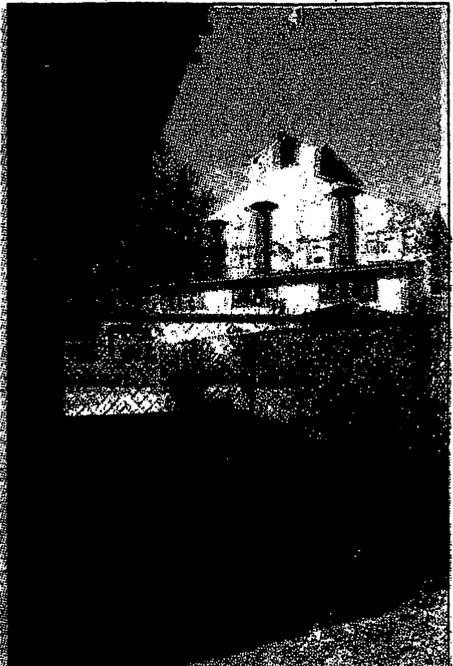


Photo by Dennis Stierer,
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11 - Kozlowski/Kreusch/Romano