

Asbestos bailout criticized

Statehouse rally rips funding proposal

**By Bill Scanlon, Rocky Mountain News
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Corporations that lied for decades about the dangers of asbestos don't deserve a bailout from Congress, family members of Coloradans dead or dying of asbestos-related disease said Thursday.

They rallied at the Colorado Capitol against a bill to set the asbestos fund at about \$110 billion, which is down about \$40 billion from earlier proposals.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, has said he tried to set a figure that would compensate families without bankrupting asbestos companies and their insurers, leaving families with nothing.

But that would mean the settlement checks would range from about \$100,000 to \$750,000, complained family members - not enough payback for the loss of loved ones, the loss of wages and the cost of medical treatment.

"These are people who fought wars, who paid taxes. Please make it right," said Steve Sanchez, whose father, Agapito, was stricken with the worst asbestos disease, mesothelioma.

Short of a tripling of the current asbestos fund proposal, the families want their day in court, and the chance to win settlements that range up to the \$43 million that one California family recently was awarded.

Frank Irvin, 70, said his asbestosis caused so many medical bills that he's forced to keep working - no longer as a master carpenter, but as a janitor for the same firm. "It's very difficult. I have to stop and rest between flights of stairs. I rest several times during the day."

Skeptics say the fight is over whether to offer generous settlements or extremely generous settlements. If the settlements get too generous, they'll come back to bite everyone, in the form of higher taxes, higher prices for goods or higher premiums from insurers whose reserve accounts are drained, they say.