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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **The 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council**

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### **Intergovernmental Relations Committee passes measure to oppose proposed termination of funding for Navajo Abandoned Mines Program**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – The Intergovernmental Relations Committee of the 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council passed a piece of legislation today opposing the proposed termination of funding to the Navajo Nation Abandoned Mine Land Program for its federal fiscal year 2011 budget.

“I consider this legislation (Legislation No. 0307-10) an emergency for the Navajo Nation Abandoned Mine Land (AML) program,” Council Delegate Phillip Harrison (Red Valley/Cove) said. “There is a proposed cut of Navajo AML funds by President Obama. We are going to oppose this so we can continue the “reclamation” of lands from the legacies of mining and milling on the Navajo Nation.”

Harrison said past mining and milling activities on the Navajo Nation have adversely impacted families, the environment, land, water and structural damages, which is why opposition is imperative.

“Many of our families have had adverse impacts from the exposure of radiation of the past,” Harrison explained. “It has been 50 years now and our lands are still like that. For Cove and Red Valley, Ariz., there are 84 sites that need to be reclaimed.”

Marietta Jensen, program projects specialist for Navajo AML, said the Office of Surface and Mining at Denver issued a statement on April 25 notifying the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Crow Nation as well as seven states of their elimination of AML funding.

“In 2006, the Surface Mining Control Reclamation Act (SMCRA) was amended to have funding returned to the Navajo Nation, which the Navajo Nation AML has been operating under, which is now in jeopardy.”

According to the Act, the Navajo AML Program is mandated to receive payments from fees collected from current and past coal production on the Navajo Nation. The amount of money distributed to tribes and states for FY 2009 was \$298.1 million and \$232.4 million for FY 2010. For FY 2011, \$164.1 million is expected to be appropriated.

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget has proposed eliminating seven (mostly south and western) states and the three tribes from the AML program and allocate “\$10 million for federal high priority coal projects, which would include newly indentified problems arising in certified states and tribes.”

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“We have been working with the Navajo Nation Office of the President and have been getting out letters to congressional delegates from the states of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah,” Jensen said. “Congress is continuing a resolution on the SMCRA amendments. Our 2011 budget is pretty much pending.”

Council Delegate George Arthur (Burnham/San Juan/Nenahnezad), chairman for the Resources Committee, provided insight on the issue and said, “The way this works is that there is a formula in place on how money is secured from active coal mining that is going on. All these years, the Navajo Nation had monies collected by federal agencies. It was not until 2005 or 2006 that the Navajo Nation tapped into these funds for reclamation and program activities.”

Arthur confirmed funding would be threatened and that monies would continue to be collected off Navajo mines.

“It is kind of interesting where these moneys are being eliminated or what states and tribes are being eliminated,” Arthur said. “President Obama has active mining in his own state. A power plant is being built in his home state and maybe if he wants to eliminate funding then he can do that to his own state.”

“The Navajo Nation is supporting our efforts in saving our program and that is what we are looking for – support from the Navajo Nation,” added Jensen. Harrison’s measure passed the committee, 7-0.

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