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Speaker Bates calls on federal government to provide compensation and long-term assistance for communities affected by the Gold King Mine spill

WINDOW ROCK – Speaker LoRenzo Bates on Tuesday, called on the federal government to expedite the compensation process for Navajo farmers and livestock owners impacted by the Gold King Mine spill, during a roundtable discussion hosted by U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Lujan (D – N.M.) at the Sycamore Community Center in Farmington, N.M.

Rep. Lujan organized the roundtable discussion to allow federal, state, county, and tribal officials the opportunity to discuss the progress of recovery efforts and to address the ongoing needs of community members impacted by the spill that occurred one year ago.

Speaker Bates urged all governmental entities in attendance to be proactive in determining how their respective authorities and resources can be used to help those impacted by the spill on a long-term basis.

“We shouldn’t expect this to go away,” said Speaker Bates. “We have to understand that there will be long-term impacts and we all have our own resources so we need to determine how these multiple jurisdictions will work together in the long-term.”

Speaker Bates also pointed out that as a farmer and livestock owner who was impacted by the spill, he fully understands the financial burden that many Navajo people continue to deal with due to the loss of crops, alfalfa, and other products.

U.S. EPA acting regional administrator for Region 9 Alexis Strauss, also took part in Tuesday’s discussion via video teleconference. Strauss noted that the federal EPA has provided over \$3



PHOTO: Speaker LoRenzo Bates (left) addresses federal, state, and county officials during a roundtable discussion related to the Gold King Mine spill in Farmington, N.M. on August 9, 2016.

million to states and tribes since the spill occurred and that the EPA would continue efforts to provide long-term monitoring of water quality in the Animas River and the San Juan River. She also said the EPA would likely hold a workshop in November in Salt Lake City for officials from impacted areas.

In response to questions posed by Speaker Bates regarding the anticipated timeline for the claims process to issue compensation for individual farmers and livestock owners, Strauss said that decisions regarding the claims process are “imminent” and would be announced very soon by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Speaker Bates also urged the officials in attendance to determine how the entities would work together in the event of another emergency in the area.

“We have to understand that this type of event could occur again given the number of mines upstream,” Speaker Bates stated.

At the conclusion of the roundtable discussion, Rep. Lujan said his office would formulate a letter to U.S. EPA administrator Gina McCarthy outlining the questions and concerns brought forth during Tuesday’s discussion.

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