



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Delegate Walter Phelps speaks on uranium issues at Congressional town hall



PHOTO: Council Delegate Walter Phelps speaks on uranium issues during a town hall meeting at the Cameron Chapter house in Cameron, Ariz. on May 30, 2018.

CAMERON, Ariz. – On Wednesday, Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tside To ii) was one of several stakeholders that spoke on the impacts of uranium during a “Uranium Town Hall” hosted by Congressman Tom O’Halloran (D-AZ) at the Cameron Chapter house. The town hall was the second hosted by Congressman O’Halloran to discuss uranium issues in tribal communities.

The communities of Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Bodaway/Gap, and Leupp are part of the U.S. EPA’s Western Abandoned Uranium Mine Region, which includes a total of 111 abandoned mine sites. Delegate Phelps said that in addition to the uranium mines, there is an unknown number of natural uranium deposits contaminating alluvial water sources for both livestock and residences.

“Due to the lack of clean potable water in the community, the Navajo Nation Council invested \$1 million in 2012 to connect to uncontaminated water sources from neighboring Bodaway/Gap. The U.S. EPA has since provided a \$1.6 million grant using its Drinking Water Tribal Set-Aside program, which will soon connect an additional 33 families to clean potable water,” stated Delegate Phelps.

He also highlighted the health impacts caused by uranium and the need for the Navajo Nation to have its own oncology center to help cancer patients who are forced to travel hundreds of miles to receive treatment.

“As a result of generations of environmentally harmful exposure, the Tuba City Regional Health Care Center must refer hundreds of cancer patients each year to off reservation treatment centers. They have spearheaded an Oncology on Navajo fundraising campaign to open a center in Tuba City using private donations. Unfortunately, the Indian Health Service and the National Cancer Institute have both declined Tuba City’s request for help in bringing cancer treatment to the Navajo people,” Delegate Phelps added.

Other stakeholders at Wednesday’s town hall included President Russell Begaye, Arizona State Sen. Jamescita Peshlakai (Dist. 7 – D), Coconino County officials, U.S. EPA officials, health officials, community members, and others.

During the town hall, Delegate Phelps also provided information on the challenges and areas of need for Cameron and neighboring chapters including infrastructure needs for the Former Bennett Freeze Area, the need to address adverse health impacts from environmental exposure, and the reclamation of abandoned uranium mines.

In 2015, the Navajo Nation Council passed legislation to establish the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission for the purpose of studying and drawing conclusions about the impacts of uranium mining and uranium processing on the Navajo Nation and to use the studies to issue recommendations for policies, laws, and regulations to the President and the Council.

Cameron Chapter secretary/treasurer Mable Franklin, who also serves on the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission representing the Western Navajo Agency, also spoke at the town hall on the effects and impacts of uranium on the local communities.

For decades, nearly 30 million tons of uranium ore was mined on or near the Navajo Nation for the purpose of producing nuclear weapons during the Cold War. There are over 500 abandoned uranium sites across the Navajo Nation.

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