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Communications Office
Office of the President and Vice President
Michele J. Crank
Mihio Manus
928.871.7000

PRESIDENT BEGAYE SAID USEPA MADE EMPTY PROMISES AND NEEDS TO REIMBURSE NAVAJO FARMERS



During the SCOIA hearing on the Gold King Mine Spill, President Begaye said the USEPA should not make empty promises and instead act upon what they say they're doing.

Phoenix, Ariz.-Today before a hearing held by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (SCOIA) regarding the Gold King Mine spill, President Russell Begaye testified that Navajo farmers are still suffering and the Nation is still waiting on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to reimburse farmers.

President Begaye was joined by 23rd Navajo Nation Council Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Hopi Chairman Herman Honanie and Assistant Administrator from the USEPA Mathy Stanislaus.

In his written testimony, President Begaye stated that the USEPA has repeatedly questioned the Navajo Nation's demands. In the eight months since the spill, President Begaye said the USEPA has avoided any real sense of accountability for its actions.

President Begaye claims the USEPA hasn't: fully compensated the Navajo Nation for the harms suffered as a result of the spill; designated the Upper Animas Mining District as a Superfund site; implemented a comprehensive plan ensuring against future contamination of Navajo land or waters; or provided the Nation with tools to address the existing harms or to mitigate future harms.

The President maintained that the USEPA should not make empty promises but instead act upon what they say they're doing. "It's like the thunder without the rain, said President Begaye.

The Navajo Nation has requested over two million dollars in expenses to be reimbursed, yet the USEPA only offered \$157,000 dollars, which totals less than eight percent of expenses incurred. The amount was offered as a 'grant'



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and not recognized as reimbursement.

Additionally, President Begaye's written statement listed eight requests which included: a fair and independent assessment of the role the USEPA played in events leading up to the Gold King Mine Spill; resources to conduct the Nation's own monitoring, testing and assessment of water, soil and crops; funds dedicated to emergency preparedness for future environmental disasters; the USEPA's full support of listing the Upper Animas Mining District on the National Priorities List; and resources to restablize farming along the San Juan River.

During the hearing Senator John McCain said the SCOIA would continue holding hearings until all questions are answered and compensation was awarded to the Nation.

"An economic analyst told the SCOIA that the Navajo Nation lost \$982,000 in agriculture production during the first

two weeks of the spill," Senator McCain said, including that costs from the disaster could reach upward of \$335 million dollars.

Senator McCain also said that because of the USEPA's lack of action and forthright involvement, a criminal investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice is merited and should occur.

President Begaye thanked both U.S. Senator McCain and U.S. Senator John Barrasso III for SCOIA's hearing today and the suggestion of a USDOJ criminal investigation.

"Navajo Farmers are still waiting for compensation. They have not received a penny," President Begaye said. "USEPA made promises but the farmers have yet to be compensated."

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