



THE NAVAJO NATION

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PRESIDENT BEGAYE SUPPORTS BIPARTISAN AMENDMENT TO EXPEDITE GOLD KING MINE SPILL RECOVERY

Washington DC- On Monday, Sep. 12, Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Tom Udall (D-NM) along with Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), and John McCain (R-AZ) introduced an amendment to address the response costs associated with the Gold King Mine spill, and direct the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to work with affected States, Indian tribes, and local governments on a long-term water quality monitoring program of the rivers contaminated by the spill.

President Russell Begaye spoke in support of the amendment, calling for rapid reimbursement for Navajo farmers and an onsite water quality lab to be set up in Shiprock to monitor the San Juan river.

"I've consistently asked for monitoring to be done on the San Juan River, the river banks and irrigation canals affected by the Gold King Mine spill. We need funds to support monitoring of vegetation and livestock as well," President Begaye said.

The bipartisan amendment expedites the reimbursement of emergency response costs assumed by States, Indian tribes, local governments, and individuals following the spill, and is intended to include costs that did not conclude by October 31, 2015. The EPA has stated the agency will not reimburse response costs after this date apart from limited exceptions.

Additionally, the amendment requires the EPA to pay out all costs eligible for reimbursement unless the agency proves with substantial evidence that the cost is not consistent with what is typically reimbursed under federal law. The measure also requires the EPA to pay out all claims within 90 days and notify parties as to whether or not it will pay the claim within 30 days of reaching its decision. Lastly, the amendment establishes a water quality monitoring program and authorizes the EPA to reimburse the States, Indian tribes, and local governments for this monitoring activity.

"We've consistently asked for a lab to be established in Shiprock, N.M. This amendment sets forth funds to be provided for monitoring of the San Juan River and irrigation canals. We need for our farmers to be confident that the water quality is irrigable," the president said. "These funds would go toward building an onsite lab to monitor the water of the San Juan river."

The loss endured by farmers as a result of the Gold King Mine spill has affected more than just one season's crops, President Begaye said. Farmers are still facing losses because of the spill.

"To this day, none of our farmers have been reimbursed and we are hopeful this bipartisan amendment will bring about rapid reimbursement to Navajo farmers," he said. "We need our Navajo farmers to be reimbursed first and foremost."

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