



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., updates Navajo miners on progress toward getting fair RECA compensation

TUBA CITY, Ariz. – A far greater percentage of federal compensation intended for all former uranium miners went disproportionately to non-Natives which caused the Navajo Nation to redouble efforts to get compensation for former Navajo miners and their families.

This was Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr.'s, message to 75 elderly Navajo uranium miners and their families here Thursday at the Tuba City Chapterhouse.

The way the federal Radiation Exposure Compensation Act was initially drafted addressed concerns of non-Native miners first who received some 80 percent of the compensation, about \$300 million, he said. Native American miners and their families ended up receiving only an estimated 12 percent of the compensation, or \$4 million, because of the difficulty they had meeting stringent eligibility requirements that did not take into account the Navajo way of life.

“Navajo people did work with uranium and breathed it in and health problems happened, yet Congress has not really listened or supported us,” President Shirley said. “This current Congress is like that. They are sitting on the funding right now. This is why we keep submitting information and we continue to wait.”

The informational meeting was sponsored by the Tuba City RECA Field Office of the Killian & Associates law firm, which was hired by the Navajo Nation to assist miners, their families and descendants obtain the compensation they are eligible for under the law.

“The attorneys and staff are working on your behalf all the time answering questions,” the President said.

The law requires former Navajo uranium workers to provide detailed work information they may not have access to, such as exactly where, when and how long they worked, what days, whether underground or on the surface, and which doctor



President Shirley addresses former Navajo miners and their families in Tuba City on Thursday to update them on continuing lobbying efforts to get them federal compensation for their work in uranium mines.

examined them for health problems. Some miners have been found ineligible if they said they smoked, not taking into account that Navajos smoke in traditional ceremonies.

However, that was not distinguished as being very different from being an habitual cigarette smoker.

Often compensation claims would be denied if an applicant failed to include a birth date or birth certificate.

Navajo sovereignty to pass its own laws and have them respected.



President Shirley meets with U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico last year to inform him of efforts by uranium companies to gain access to Navajo uranium despite the Diné Natural Resource Protection Act banning uranium mining and process on Navajoland.

“Many of you were born at home in a hogan and didn’t receive a piece of paper with this information on it,” the President said. “Our mothers gave birth to us holding on to a sash belt and we remember a specific season, not a date and time. This has created a lot of problems for us now. We are working very hard to rewrite the legislation to address our challenges. It looks like we are getting closer to a solution.”

The President said the Navajo Nation appropriated \$150,000 for legal expenses, and has lobbied Congressional officials to inform them of the disparity facing Navajos and action the Navajo Nation has taken to protect its people from uranium-caused illness and death from every occurring again.

In April of 2005, the Navajo Nation passed the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act in 2005, banning any uranium mining or processing on Navajoland. However, because of rising prices for uranium – now at \$52 per pound – and continued interest in Navajo uranium by the uranium industry, President Shirley began seeking support and respect for

Last June, he traveled to Paris, France, to meet with Ahmed Sayyad, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Cooperation for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, to inform him of the law and to seek UNESCO recognition and support of the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act.

Then, in September, he visited numerous U.S. congressmen and senators in Washington, to seek their support of sovereignty and respect for the Navajo uranium ban.

Also last year, the Navajo Nation’s Diné Natural Resources Protection Act was honored twice; by the Nuclear-Free Future Award Special Recognition, presented by the Munich-based Franz Moll Foundation and the International Physicians for the Prevention of

Nuclear War, and the Bob Haozous DAANAHT’EKE Award from the New Mexico Environmental Law Center, for environmental and cultural protection.

President Shirley told the miners and their families in Tuba City that continued lobbying is how to bring changes about in the law.

“If these officials are not aware of our situation, then they vote against it. So it important to visit each of them,” he said. “We tell them of people affected by this uranium, the elderly and the children. The government’s actions have affected our lives.”

The President said another difficulty is the usual different points of view between Democratic and Republican members of Congress.

He reported that the original RECA law approved compensation only for people affected by uranium and people called “Downwinders,” who lived downwind of nuclear test and were affected by atmospheric fallout. That law was amended to include workman’s compensation.

Meanwhile, uranium companies still want to mine uranium on Navajo land because it has risen in value to \$52 per pound.

“Navajos said no more mining, so they (the companies) turned around and are lobbying the states and the U.S. government,

saying that even though Navajos say no, allow us to mine,” the President said.

“The government never told us this is dangerous so we just went to work,” he said. “This is the reason I am opposed to this mining. This is why we passed a law that bans mining on Navajo. We ask for your prayers to keep our laws in place and that our laws will be recognized.”

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