



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council members meet with coal mine workers to address concerns



PHOTO: Speaker LoRenzo Bates addresses employees at Kayenta Mine on March 22, 2017.

BLACK MESA, Ariz. – Last Wednesday, Speaker LoRenzo Bates and Council Delegates Tom Chee and Nathaniel Brown met with over 100 employees from Peabody Coal Mine also known as Kayenta Mine, to provide information to the miners regarding the status of Navajo Generating Station and possible implications for the coal mine and its employees.

Speaker Bates and general manager Audry Rappleyea addressed the workers at the coal mine and reassured the workers that the Council is working with the Department of the Interior and NGS stakeholders to determine how the power plant can remain open beyond 2019, which is when the NGS owners have voted to end their ownership of NGS.

Kayenta Mine is the sole provider of the coal that NGS uses to produce electricity. If NGS closes, the mine owner would likely have to identify another purchaser of the coal that is mined at Kayenta Mine.

“We want you all to know and to understand the complexities of the situation because the current situation has the potential to impact you, but we are working with all the stakeholders to reach a solution,” said Speaker Bates.

According to Rappleyea, last year Peabody paid the Navajo Nation approximately \$26 million in coal royalties that benefit the Nation each year. Speaker Bates explained the overall financial impact that a closure would have on the Nation and the entire state of Arizona.

Following his presentation, Speaker Bates answered questions from the coal mine workers. One miner said he has worked at the mine for 43-years and asked the members of the Council to continue advocating for the mine and its workers.

“I am asking you to continue fighting for our livelihoods,” said the employee. “Especially for the young workers, our sons and daughters.”

In February, Speaker Bates and President Russell Begaye met with Acting Deputy Secretary of the Interior James E. Cason, other federal and tribal officials, and stakeholders to discuss potential options for Navajo Generating Station.

The potential closure of the power plant is due in large part to the low cost of natural gas compared to coal. Officials with Salt River Project have stated that they will continue the operation of NGS until 2019, as long as the Navajo Nation is able to amend or change the current lease agreement to allow additional time after 2019 for reclamation efforts. If a lease extension is not finalized in the coming months, NGS owners say they would be forced to close the plant in July 2017 in order to begin and complete the two-year reclamation process by 2019.

During the February meeting, Deputy Secretary Cason asked the stakeholders for their assistance in working collectively to complete several tasks including identifying potential new owners and an operator for the power plant, and identifying potential purchasers for the electricity produced by NGS. The stakeholders and federal officials will meet again in April, to report their findings and further discuss plans to keep Navajo Generating Station in operation for the long-term.

“We want to keep employees informed of what the Council is doing to address NGS and Kayenta Mine,” added Speaker Bates, who is also planning to address NGS workers to provide them with an update and to address their questions and concerns.

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