23rd Navajo Nation Council
Office of the Speaker

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Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. and Congressman Tom O'Halleran meet with abandoned uranium mine community members

TACHEE/BLUE GAP, Ariz. – Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), who represents the community of Tachee/Blue Gap on the 23rd Navajo Nation Council, invited US Congressman Tom O'Halleran (D-AZ) to tour the Claim 28 abandoned uranium site on Tuesday, which is located approximately five-miles northeast of Tachee/Blue Gap Chapter.

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. As a result, there are over 500 abandoned uranium mine sites across the Navajo Nation including the Claim 28 site.

PHOTO: Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, Congressman Tom O'Halleran, and Tachee/Blue Gap Chapter community members at the Claim 28 site in Tachee/Blue Gap, Ariz. on July 31, 2018.

During the site visit, Congressman O'Halleran met with community members, Tachee/Blue Gap Chapter officials, Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, Navajo Nation Abandoned Mine Lands, the Super Fund program, and the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission regarding the Claim 28 site.

"The purpose of the site visit is to show our national leaders that the community of Tachee/Blue Gap continues to suffer from a great hazardous disaster that effects the livelihoods of community members everyday since the opening of the uranium mine in the late 1940's. The community continues to seek immediate remediation regarding Claim 28," said Delegate Begay. "This is a critical issue because many families live within a mile of the abandoned uranium mine."

Tachee/Blue Gap Chapter president Aaron Yazzie, stated that the community has been pleading for a cleanup of the mine since 1988 and that approximately 17 homes are located near the mine.

Claim 28 is a dangerous and hazardous site that impacts the health, land, air, water, livestock, and wildlife of the community, added Yazzie.

Delegate Begay stated that in 2015, the United States and the Navajo Nation reached an agreement for the federal government to fund assessments of 16 priority abandoned uranium mine sites, which includes the Claim 28 site. However, the cleanup needs to be funded and completed immediately.

“The families have lost many relatives due to health problems caused from the mine. In addition to the mine cleanup, the families request for compensation to address their traumas, new housings to replace their current contaminated structures, and infrastructure,” said Delegate Begay. “The families need closure to the abandoned uranium mine site and to ensure that there is no further uranium exposure to community members in the future.”

At the end of the site visit, Congressman O’Halleran expressed his appreciation to the community of Tachee/Blue Gap for their advocacy and dedication to address the issues of Claim 28.

“It saddens me that families experience the negative impacts of the mine everyday. Moreover, it shocks me that I am the only national leadership that has visited the community regarding the abandoned mine. If this mine was located in central metropolitan, the federal government would clean it up immediately, but it’s tragic that Claim 28 has been ignored for many decades,” said Congressman O’Halleran.

PHOTO: Tachee/Blue Gap community members express concerns regarding Claim 28 site to Congressman Tom O’Halleran at Tachee/Blue Gap Chapter on July 31, 2018.

On the behalf of the Claim 28 residents, Seraphina Nez, also a member of the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission, commended Congressman O’Halleran for visiting the Claim 28 site and requested that he considers the families and community’s concerns at the federal level.

Delegate Begay stated that the Navajo Nation Council and Tachee/Blue Gap Chapter would continue to push forward for the abandoned uranium mine cleanup with the assistance coordination of Congressman O’Halleran’s office.

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