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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NAVAJO EPA DIRECTOR TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS ON GOLD KING MINE
SPILL**

Washington, DC – Navajo Nation Environment Protection Administration (NNEPA) Executive Director Dr. Donald Benn today testified before the United States House Committee on Science, Space and Technology on the Gold King Mine Spill. Dr. Benn discussed the devastating effects of the chemical spill on the Navajo Nation and called for greater support from the Federal Government to address the crisis.

“The Navajo Nation’s impacts are felt most in the disruption of our cultural principle of *hozho*, which encompasses beauty, order, and harmony, and expresses the idea of striving to maintain balance in the Navajo universe,” testified Dr. Benn. “The impairment of the River and the adverse impacts to our farmers and ranchers, and our community as a whole, will mark a moment of community trauma that will be remembered for years to come. This modernized trauma will compound our already significant historical trauma.”

He also highlighted the United States Environmental Protection Agency’s (USEPA) failed response to the spill.

“A good and close working relationship with USEPA has always been critical to the success of the NNEPA. However, recent events relating to this spill have led to a complete shift in that relationship as USEPA has sought to quiet our legitimate concerns, and has made repeated missteps in their response efforts relating to the incident triggered by their own actions,” testified Dr. Benn. “From day one, USEPA has assumed a posture of mitigating losses even while taking the lead on the incident investigation and emergency response. We have grave concerns about the strong conflict of interest USEPA has with respect to this investigation and the emergency response.”

Dr. Benn made the following specific requests of the Committee:

- Resources to address the immediate emergency.
- Resources to study and address the long-term environmental and health impacts of the spill.
- FEMA coordination.
- A critical, independent examination of the existing USEPA (defined below) organization with respect to coordination with the Navajo Nation, with serious consideration given to the creation of a Navajo USEPA Region or devolution of USEPA authority and funding directly to Navajo Nation's own Environmental Protection Agency to assume USEPA's responsibilities for the Navajo people.
- A fair and independent assessment of the role USEPA played in the events leading up to the chemical spill from the Gold King Mine.

This was the first of four Congressional hearings scheduled this month on the Gold King Mine Spill. Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye is scheduled to travel to Washington, DC and testify before the US Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on September 16th and before a joint hearing of the US House Natural Resources Committee and Oversight Committee on September 17th.

[CLICK HERE FOR DR. BENN'S FULL TESTIMONY](http://bit.ly/1UHnjYU) <http://bit.ly/1UHnjYU>

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