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President Begaye and Senator McCain meet to discuss key issues facing the Navajo Nation

Twin Arrows-Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye met with US Senator John McCain today to discuss key issues such as Senator Pierce's Ft. Wingate Bill, the US EPA's role in the compensation and remediation regarding the Gold King Mine spill and establishing an Oncology Treatment Center on the Navajo Nation.

President Begaye asked for Senator McCain's support in removing the 'right of way' language that was inserted into Senator Pierce's Ft. Wingate Bill, which would waive right of way fees the Nation could charge municipalities and power companies to access tribal land.

"We would like to have the right of way language removed from the Ft. Wingate Bill. We are moving forward on this in agreement with Council," said President Begaye. "Having met with Senator Udall last week, he agreed with us. We'd like that language removed."

Regarding the Gold King Mine spill, President Begaye told Senator McCain that the area farmers have yet to be compensated for their losses. The president pushed for the US EPA to provide compensation while also providing funding and resources for remediation of the river.

"If the Gold King Mine spill would have taken place in Connecticut, the response would have been totally different," said Senator McCain. "I don't think the response was adequate for this disaster."

Senator McCain also addressed the Office of Navajo Hopi Indian Relocation (OHNIR), stating that he would like to "do away with the commission".

"We should never forget that Federal Government created the FBFA and interfered in a land dispute between two tribal nations. This has left a bad impression on both nations for the past forty years," McCain said.

President Begaye said the Bennett Freeze has devastated the



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people who reside in the area. Residents of the FBFA have gone for forty years without being able to renovate their homes or develop basic infrastructure needs.

Director of Navajo Hopi Land Commission Office Wenona Bernally said there are 200 cases on the docket that have yet to be heard regarding the administrative appeals that are pending before OHNIR. These appeals were filed by HPL residents who were denied relocation benefits.

"There has to be an end sometime," McCain said. "At some point, it has to stop."

President Begaye said too much money has gone toward legal issues that should have gone toward more beneficial uses like funding housing projects.

Delegate Walter Phelps requested an oversight hearing in Washington, DC, this fall regarding the FBFA. Both President Begaye and Senator McCain agreed that an oversight hearing should happen.

President Begaye along with Delegate Phelps and CEO of Tuba City Health Care Corporation Lynette Bonar advocated for an Oncology Treatment Center to be established on the Navajo Nation.

“We would like to be the leaders in cancer treatment on the Navajo Nation,” President Begaye said. “Cancer rates continue to rise and this facility is highly needed.”

According to a 2004 cancer study, Navajos are diagnosed later in stages and rarely receive radiation treatment. Also, affordability is a large hindrance to treatment as is transportation to facilities.

“It’s not just the older people who worked at the mines, it’s the younger people as well,” President Begaye said. “The impacts of cancer from exposure over time, whether to water or soil or gamma rays from uranium mines, affect the Nation and our people.”



Left to right: Director of OHNIR Wenona Benally, Council Delegate Walter Phelps, CEO of Tuba City Health Care Corporation Lynette Bonar, US Senator John McCain, President Russell Begaye and State Representative Carlyle Begay.

Senator McCain asked President Begaye for letters addressing each of these issues, stating that he would support the Nation’s positions.