



The Navajo Nation
Yideeskáądi Nitsáhákees

DR. BUU NYGREN *PRESIDENT*
RICHELLE MONTOYA *VICE PRESIDENT*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Aug. 29, 2024

CONTACT: George Hardeen, Public Relations Director

Email: george.hardeen@navajo-nsn.gov

Cell: 928-810-9174

Navajo President Buu Nygren says message of amendments to Radiation Materials Transportation Act is 'respect tribal sovereignty'

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren said the message in amendments to strengthen a tribal law to regulate transportation of radioactive material across the Navajo Nation is "respect tribal sovereignty."

"Respect tribal sovereignty and work with us," he said Thursday before signing amendments to the 2012 Radioactive and Related Substances, Equipment, Vehicles, Persons and Materials Transportation Act.

"We are able to speak in English in this day and time," he said. "We've got our own attorneys, our own lawyers, and they are more than capable to come up with deals and solutions."

Having discussions with corporations to work with the Navajo Nation will benefit both the state of Arizona and the U.S. as a whole, he said.

On Monday, the Navajo Nation Council passed emergency legislation by a unanimous vote of 15-0 to amend the 12-year-old law.

Stephen Etsitty, executive director of the Navajo Nation EPA, said the most significant change calls for advance notification from a company like Energy Fuels Resources, owner of the Pinyon Plain Mine south of the Grand Canyon.



Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren said the message in amendments the Radiation Transportation Act is "respect tribal sovereignty."

He said it's needed if a company plans to transport any radioactive materials across the Navajo Nation.

"It was originally four days, but it's now seven days," he said. "It doesn't seem like it's a big change, but it's an important thing. We didn't get advanced notification for the first hauling action that occurred."

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Casey Allen Johnson said the amendments are a way to strengthen Navajo law to ensure Navajo people are protected from exposure to radioactive materials.

He told the audience at Navajo Nation Veterans Memorial Park that he lost his father to stomach cancer last week that he attributed to uranium exposure. He said he lost his mother to the same illness 25 years earlier.

“This is something that is dear to my heart, this legislation, all these uranium legislations,” he said. “This legislation is my tears and arrows.”

He said he wanted to work in unity with the states of Arizona, New Mexico and all tribal nations to stand together to protect Native people.

The legislation was co-sponsored by Council Delegate Brenda Jesus, chair of the Resources and Development Committee.

Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch said much of the work of the Navajo Nation Department of Justice has to do with uranium remediation.

“That’s part of why the Nation needed to respond so strongly here, to push back and ensure that our community doesn’t continue to get disproportionately burdened with radiation and uranium-based waste and contamination,” she said.

She said the DOJ and Navajo EPA are in discussions with Energy Fuels Resources to make sure any transportation of radioactive material on the Nation is done in a responsible and careful way that provides maximum protection to the public and minimize contamination that might occur.

Director Etsitty said the 2012 law did not have regulations established because there was no active uranium mining near the Navajo Nation until



Navajo Nation Council Delegate Casey Allen Johnson, sponsor of the amendments, said the legislation is something close to his heart. “This legislation is my tears and arrows.”

January 2024. Now, the six-month moratorium period called for in President Nygren’s July 31 executive order will allow a set of interim regulations to provide the framework for Energy Fuels and the Nation will work together, he said.

“We had draft regulations as far back as 2017 but it wasn’t until all of this active uranium mining started happening in January that we pulled everything off the shelves and started working on it again,” he said. “And then when the President called for these regulations earlier this spring, council finally got to work, and we worked together and put all this package together.”

Miss Navajo Nation Amy N. Begaye, who will complete her year-long reign on Sept. 7, was asked to say a few words. She silenced the audience when she said her family, too, was touched by uranium radiation exposure.

“I lost my chei almost 10 years ago,” she said. “I lost my chei due to uranium exposure, along with tuberculosis and lung cancer and black lung. And so growing up, I knew the dangers of uranium at such a young age.”