



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 2, 2015

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### **Navajo Nation leaders discuss water contamination issues with U.S. Senator Tom Udall**



**PHOTO: Council Delegate Tom Chee addresses U.S. Senator Tom Udall (far right), President Russell Begaye, Vice President Jonathan Nez, and Council members on Sept. 2, 2015.**

**SHIPROCK, N.M.** – During a one hour meeting with U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) on Wednesday, Speaker LoRenzo Bates along with Council Delegates Amber Kanazbah Crotty and Tom Chee urged the Congressman to assist in expediting the reimbursement process for local Navajo farmers who continue to face financial burdens due to the contamination caused by the spill at Gold King Mine on Aug. 5.

President Russell Begaye, Vice President Jonathan Nez, Shiprock Chapter President Duane Yazzie, and Gad'i'áhi Farm Board official Gilbert Harrison were also in attendance to provide information and to advocate for assistance.

During the meeting, Speaker Bates said he has met with local farmers on several occasions, many of whom continue to ask if compensation will be expedited from the federal government, aside from compensation through the submittal of the Standard Form 95.

As an owner and operator of a 30-acre farm near the San Juan River, Speaker Bates provided Sen. Udall a firsthand perspective of the financial losses incurred due to water restrictions that were placed on the communities of San Juan, Upper Fruitland, and Nenahnezad for 18 days due to the spill. Overall, the estimated financial toll is now in the thousands and growing each day for all Navajo farmers, according to Speaker Bates.

Additionally, he emphasized that thousands of other Navajo farmers are faced with the same situation, including those in chapters that are still restricted from using water from the San Juan River for irrigational purposes.

Delegates Crotty and Chee, who each represent communities that are directly impacted by water restrictions, told Sen. Udall that it's important to remain mindful of the mental wellbeing of the people who are impacted and to provide resources to assist.

Delegate Chee said the situation has inflicted mental and emotional distress on individuals that may take years to undo.

"What about compensation for the alteration of our people's worldview?" asked Delegate Chee, referring to the mental distress placed on community members.

Delegate Crotty stated that she recently testified at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's tribal consultation to advocate for public health/mental health crisis funding for the community members who are suffering due to the water contamination.

"I would like your help to declare this as a mental health emergency," said Delegate Crotty. "I want you to know that these farms were created with prayers and blessings and this is where we're restoring our youth who are finding their identity through these teachings."

Delegate Crotty also noted that there are reports of increased domestic violence due to the distress and trauma placed on families, while urging Sen. Udall to support mental health efforts.

Gadi'í'áhi Farm Board official and president of the San Juan River Farm Board Gilbert Harrison, said the public needs to be assured that crops produced by farmers are safe for consumption.

"For many, the sale of crops is the main source of income for families and we need to continue to support them," said Delegate Chee, who on Tuesday issued a radio address to encourage the public to continue supporting local Navajo farmers by purchasing their food products.

Prior to the conclusion of the meeting, Sen. Udall said his staff has been present throughout the impacted communities since the spill occurred and ensured the continued support of his office and Congressional colleagues.

"The most important thing is for all of us to be together on this and push solidly. In Congress, we have Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico senators all working together," added Sen. Udall.

Navajo Nation officials also thanked Sen. Udall for issuing a joint letter with U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ), requesting the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to hold an oversight hearing on the mine spill. On Aug. 26, U.S. Senator John Barrasso (R-WY), chairman of the SCIA, announced that the committee will hold a hearing entitled, "EPA's Gold King Mine Disaster: Examining the Harmful Impacts to Indian Country" on Sept. 16.

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