



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**RDC Delegates Kee Allen Begay Jr. and
Mark Freeland meet with US EPA Administrators in Washington**



PHOTO: Hon. Mark Freeland, Hon. Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Special Advisor for House Affairs JohnMark Kolb, and Deputy Associate Administrator Travis Voyles discussed improving the Navajo Nation's involvement in regional and federal policy decisions on Jan. 9, 2020.

WASHINGTON – Jan. 12, 2020 – Resources and Development Committee members Hon. Kee Allen Begay, Jr. and Hon. Mark Freeland met with administrators at the United States Environmental Protection Agency headquarters Jan. 9 to discuss abandoned uranium mine reclamation funding and to request greater accountability from the US EPA Region 9 office that services the Navajo Nation.

Special Advisor for House Affairs JohnMark Kolb and Deputy Associate Administrator Travis Voyles of the US EPA administration responded to Delegate Begay's request for more direct consultation by the regional offices with an assurance that the issues the Nation is facing have now been elevated to the administration level.

"The more knowledgeable that people are here at the headquarter level, the more improvement at the region level," said Voyles.

Over the past year, the US EPA administration has been encouraging greater collaboration among the regional offices that serve the Navajo Nation. The structure of the EPA gives the regional offices a great deal of autonomy in conducting their region's affairs, said the US EPA representatives.

"Region 9 is the lead, but we've encouraged Region 6 and Region 8 to be more engaged to provide more resources," said Voyles.

-MORE-

In a significant regional strategic plan update, the San Francisco-based Region 9 EPA office did not make any meaningful effort to include input from the Navajo Nation, said Delegate Begay.

Federal and State Policy Advisor to the Office of the Speaker Carlyle Begay added that, previously, Navajo Nation EPA Director Oliver Whaley expressed his openness to being involved in the plan update.

Based on input received by both the Navajo Nation EPA program and the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission, both Delegate Begay and Delegate Freeland made a request to coordinate a later meeting with key federal and Navajo EPA and uranium officials. The meeting would focus on specific policy recommendations that allow the Navajo Nation to more effectively and directly administer EPA funding.

Both Delegate Begay and Delegate Freeland stated that the work of creating a stronger, more accountable, and more independent Navajo Nation EPA program remains a top priority for the Resources and Development Committee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council.

Delegate Begay continued by pointing out that the US EPA currently has one evaluator, called a trustee, that is responsible for developing plans for each identified abandoned uranium mine. For the Navajo Nation, that means one person must perform the task for more than 500 abandoned mines, said Delegate Begay.

In relation to eastern Navajo uranium priorities, Delegate Freeland made a specific request to the EPA administrators to continue pushing for the Church Rock Mine's cleanup.

Both delegates added that RDC would like to see a greater portion of federal EPA funding directed straight into the Navajo Nation EPA program. The administrators added that the Navajo Nation EPA has demonstrated a strong record of utilizing the federal taxpayer dollars given to the program thus far.

The EPA representatives shared that the regions and programs working with tribal governments, including the Navajo Nation, have raised the input from tribal representatives continuously over the past year with EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler. That input, said Voyles, is important in upcoming budget formulations at the federal level.

Delegate Begay and Delegate Freeland thanked the US EPA representatives for listening to the input on a government-to-government basis and made arrangements to follow up with supporting resolutions and documentation to assist the EPA administration in addressing policies at the federal level. The meeting was part of an advocacy and coordination trip with Congressional members and several federal departments and agencies.

###

MEDIA CONTACTS

Rick Abasta, Communications Director, (928) 530-8197

Byron C. Shorty, Sr. Public Information Officer, (928) 287-2085

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

www.navajonationcouncil.org