



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Speaker Bates to testify before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs during hearing on “Examining EPA’s Unacceptable Response to Indian Tribes”

WINDOW ROCK – On March 28, U.S. Senator John Barrasso (R-WY), chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, issued a letter to Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) inviting him to testify at an oversight hearing on “Examining EPA’s Unacceptable Response to Indian Tribes.” The field oversight hearing will take place on Friday in Phoenix, Ariz. at the Phoenix City Hall, beginning at 10:30 a.m. MST.

According to a press release from the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs dated April 15, the hearing will provide an opportunity for committee members to demand answers from the U.S. EPA regarding the impact of the Gold King Mine spill that occurred on Aug. 5, 2015, and other environmental issues in the region. Committee members will also receive testimony from tribal leaders concerning the EPA’s responses to issues affecting their communities.

Speaker Bates, a farmer and livestock owner from the community of Upper Fruitland, said he will provide testimony as a delegate of the Council, representing the communities of Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, and Upper Fruitland – all of which were impacted by the spill.

He also stated that he and the local chapters are disappointed that the field hearing will be held in Phoenix despite numerous resolutions passed by the impacted chapters to hold the field hearing on the Navajo Nation. Council members also issued letters of support in recent months as well.

Among other areas, the testimony from Speaker Bates will focus on compensation for individual Navajo people affected by the spill, the need for long-term monitoring of water, sediment, and other resources, the need for assurance from the federal government that livestock and agricultural products will be safe for sale and consumption, and the need for federal and tribal entities to work closer together and provide clear, timely, and accurate information to the Navajo public with one consistent voice.

“One issue that requires immediate attention is the compensation of farmers, livestock owners, and many other individual Navajo people who continue to be subjected to financial losses due to the spill,” said Speaker Bates. “Nearly nine months have passed since the spill occurred and not one single farmer, livestock owner, or others affected by the spill have been compensated for their losses.”

Speaker Bates said he understands that there is a process that must be followed in order to issue financial compensation to individuals, adding that the Navajo people need to be informed of the timeline associated with that process and be compensated as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The testimony will also address a resolution passed by the Council's Naabik'iyátí' Committee on April 14, urging the President of the United States and his designees to hold the U.S. EPA accountable for their negligence resulting in a toxic spill from the Gold King Mine into the Animas River and causing catastrophic consequences for the Navajo Nation.

The resolution states, "On behalf of the Navajo People in need of urgent attention, the Navajo Nation demands that the President of the United States and his designees hold the United States Environmental Protection Agency and other responsible parties accountable for their misconduct resulting in a toxic spill from the Gold King Mine into the Animas River and causing catastrophic and far-reaching consequences for the people of the Navajo Nation."

Testimony from Friday's field hearing will be made available at <http://www.indian.senate.gov/>.

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