



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 8, 2024

Navajo Nation Environmental Remediation Fund ensures the protection and longevity of Navajo lands



Council Delegate Dr. Andy Nez (second from left) joined Navajo President Buu Nygren (center) and gathered officials for the signing of Legislation 0149-24 to establish the Navajo Nation Remediation Fund.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Thursday, Council Delegate Dr. Andy Nez joined Navajo Nation President Dr. Buu Nygren at Red Lake Chapter as he signed Legislation 0149-24, establishing the Navajo Nation Remediation Fund to ensure funding for the cleanup of contaminated sites across the Navajo Nation.

Legislation 0149-24, sponsored by Council Delegate Dr. Nez and approved during the 2024 Fall Council Session, establishes the Navajo Nation Environmental Remediation Fund that is set up from an automatic two percent set aside from the General Fund.

The fund supports the Navajo Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) and its contractors in assessing, cleaning up, and remediating former business and industrial sites on the Navajo Nation that are contaminated with harmful chemicals, threatening human health, public welfare, livestock, crops, groundwater, and the environment.

Council Delegate Dr. Nez spoke with President Nygren ahead of the signing to explain the significance that the legislation will have on Sawmill, Red Lake, and other Navajo communities.

“One of the main things about this legislation is that it ensures the protection, longevity, and importance of our land. Over time, there have been a lot of different businesses, whether commercial or industrial, that have disrupted our land,” Council Delegate Dr. Nez said. “The intent of this legislation is to address these issues. When we talk about business sites, it’s the contamination efforts that we’re helping clean up through remediation efforts.”

The signing at Red Lake Chapter is important because it is next to the former Navajo Forest Products Industry (NFPI) site, which has been closed for over 25 years but still suffers from severe contamination from past operations.

Council Delegate Dr. Nez noted that an initial legislation to address the NFPI was discussed on Nov. 30, 2023.

“At that time, I mentioned that these efforts and this legislation are for our future generations. We want them to grow up in space and land that is not only beautified but has potential for different opportunities,” he said. “The establishment of the Navajo Nation Remediation Fund is part of a greater economic plan that will benefit communities impacted by commercial and industrial contamination.”

NEPA Executive Director Stephen Etsitty commended the chapters involved for working together to address a great need by ensuring funding that will be shared among multiple communities.

“An exciting thing for me is to get the cleanup going. Section by section, we can get the land in shape for reuse,” Director Etsitty said. “Who knows what the children of the future will be able to use this land for once it’s cleaned up.”

Council Delegate Dr. Nez thanked Crystal Chapter, Fort Defiance Chapter, Red Lake Chapter, Sawmill Chapter, former NEPA Remedial Project Manager Pam Maples, Executive Director of the Navajo Townsite Community Development Corporation Prestene Garnenez, NEPA Executive Director Stephen Etsitty, NEPA Waste Regulatory and Compliance Department Manager Warren Roan and everyone involved for driving the discussions that led to the creation of this legislation.

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