



NAVAJO NATION OFFICE OF THE  
PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT  
RUSSELL BEGAYE | JONATHAN NEZ

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **BEGAYE TESTIFIES BEFORE HOUSE OVERSIGHT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEES**

WASHINGTON – President Russell Begaye today testified before a joint session of the House Committees on Oversight and Government Reform and Natural Resources on the Gold King Mine Spill. President Begaye asked the committees for more Federal support to cope with the disaster.

“Today we come to ask for your help. The White House is silent. FEMA, DOI and other federal agencies are being told by the USEPA to not use their own resources to help us,” testified President Begaye. “USEPA has made promises but we have not seen any of these promises fulfilled. The promises remain empty. They are like the thunder we hear over our land but with no rain.”

In his opening statements, Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT) told USEPA Administrator Gina McCarthy that making sure USEPA was held accountable was the primary cause and reason for the hearing.

“We want to find out what happened, how to solve it and to make sure it doesn’t happen again,” he said. “We want to find out why EPA was so slow to notify downstream users of what was happening. I’m very proud of the tribes in the area that were effective with the resources that they had.”

Congressman Stephen F. Lynch (D-MASS) told the joint committee that he used to live in Farmington, N.M. He said he knows the Navajo people are intensely invested spiritually in their land.

“What are we going to do to make things right with the Navajo?” he asked Administrator McCarthy. “They are a sovereign nation and we have a huge responsibility to rectify this situation.”

Representative Paul A. Gosar (R-AZ) asked President Begaye if he felt the EPA's coordination was adequate in notifying the Navajo Nation.

"If coordination is waiting a day before notification happens, I don't think that is coordination at all," President Begaye answered.

Congressman Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM) asked that a memo from EPA be added to the record in which the EPA itself stated that they waited 24 hours before notifying their very own agency in Region 8 about the spill. This was before the EPA had ever notified any of the surrounding states or the tribes.

President Begaye outlined the following requests for Congress:

- First and foremost is compensation. The farmers and ranchers cannot wait months before they are compensated for their damages. Have the EPA setup an Emergency Compensation Fund and provide ongoing repayment of losses as they are submitted.
- Alternative water source for drinking, for livestock and for irrigating farms. We need wells to be drilled, a reservoir built and water piped from the Navajo Dam.
- USEPA must build a laboratory on the Navajo Nation so we can continuously test our water, soil, plants, and livestock.
- The Committee should tell President Obama to declare the San Juan River a disaster area. Only then will other federal agencies beside EPA provide services we need. This will allow FEMA, USDA, DOI and other federal agencies to provide resources we need now.
- The Committee should hold a follow up hearing 6 months from now to keep USEPA accountable for this crisis.

President Begaye also testified yesterday before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

President Begaye's full testimony is enclosed:

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## TESTIMONY BEFORE CONGRESS

Good Morning. Chairman Chaffetz (Oversight and Government Reform)  
Chairman Rob Bishop (House Committee on Natural Resources) and ranking members of  
the committees.

My Name is RUSSELL BEGAYE of the KINLICHIIINII and BITAHNI clan and I am the  
PRESIDENT of the NAVAJO NATION.

I was born and raised along the San Juan River in Shiprock, NM. Years ago, when I was a  
little boy, we saw hundreds of dead fish floating down the river. As boys we jump in the  
river catching the dying fish. I have been wondering for years, what happened and why  
were those fish were dead.

Just a month ago, I finally got an answer. On August 13 when Administrator McCarthy came  
to visit our Nation, I learned 1.5 million gallons of radium 226 spilled from the Uranium  
Mill Site located by the bridge in Shiprock. We not only swam in that radioactive water but  
my brothers, my community ate the contaminated fish. USEPA did not warn the people  
when that spill occurred or helped the community recover, instead kept quiet.

I am asking members of these two committees to not allow history to repeat itself. Hold the  
EPA accountable for the toxic spill that occur on August 5th about a month and half ago.  
Don't let them get away with their negligence.

My people are suffering. Much of the organic crops have been lost. Our livestock are penned  
up. Our farmers and ranchers are exhausted from hauling water. Our children are afraid of  
the river. We have been told by the EPA that clean up will take decades. This is what we  
will have to live with for years to come.

So, today we come to ask for your help. The White House is silent. FEMA, DOI and other  
federal agencies are being told to not use their own resources to help us by the USEPA.

USEPA has made promises but we have not seen any of these promises fulfilled. The  
promises remain empty. They are like the thunder we hear over our land but with no rain.

Our people need...

1. First and foremost is compensation now. The farmers and ranchers cannot wait months  
before they are compensated for their damages. I know this year bills will not be paid,  
clothing for children will not be bought, and food will be scarce. Have the EPA setup an  
Emergency Compensation Fund and provide ongoing repayment of losses as they are  
submitted. Don't be a party to this injustice by having our farmers waive future claims after  
they get their first compensation checks.

2. We need an alternative water source for drinking, for our livestock and for irrigating our farms. We are asking that wells be drilled, a reservoir built and water be piped from the Navajo Dam.
3. We want the EPA to build us a laboratory on the Navajo Nation so we can continuously test our water, soil, plants, and livestock.
5. We are asking this Committee to tell President Obama to declare the San Juan river a disaster area. Only then will other federal agencies beside EPA provide services we need. This will allow FEMA, USDA, DOI and other federal agencies to provide resources we need now.
6. We are asking this Committee to hold a follow up hearing 6 months from now because we do not want this to become old news a week from now.

The Navajo Nation will not let any and all negligent parties to get away with this disaster. We will stand our ground until our River and river beds are safe once again for our children to play in and our people to use as a drinking source.

The Navajo Nation will no longer stand back when these types of atrocities are done to our people, our land, and our water for WATER IS LIFE.

I thank you for your time and attention and we will look to your leadership to right this injustice. Ahehee.