



THE NAVAJO NATION

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President Begaye encouraged by House action on Native energy bill

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye applauded House passage of HR 538, the Native American Energy Act, introduced by Rep. Don Young, (R-Alaska). The bill streamlines federal regulations surrounding energy development requirements on Native lands. President Begaye urged the Senate to take swift action to pass a tribal energy bill that would increase economic development, create jobs and give tribes the flexibility they require to best meet the needs of their communities.

“This bill will help our people regain governance over resources on our own lands. In particular, Section 8 of the bill authorizes the Nation to negotiate and enter into mineral leases without the time, monetary, and sovereignty cost of review and approval by the Interior secretary for actions on our own lands. The current leasing approval process is rife with delays and can serve as a major and unnecessary impediment for energy and job growth in Indian Country,” said President Begaye.

Navajo Nation Reps. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), Ann Kirkpatrick (D-Ariz.), and Steve Pearce (R-N.M.), voted for the bill, while Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.), and Michelle Grisham-Lujan, (D-N.M.), voted against the bill.

The White House opposed the bill saying it would “undermine public participation and transparency of review of projects on Indian lands under the National Environmental Policy Act.” The White House also noted, “the bill’s changes to mineral leasing laws applicable to the Navajo Nation lands may adversely affect energy development on those lands.” Despite this concern, the Navajo Oil and Gas Company has come out in support of the Navajo leasing amendments.

On June 15, the Government Accountability Office issued a report that found the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ management shortcomings has hindered Indian energy development. The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs will hold an oversight hearing on Oct. 21, 2015 on the report and Indian energy development. President Begaye looks forward to this hearing and urges the White House to consider support for this bill, which is aligned with the administration’s historic support for tribal self-governance and sovereignty.

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Nation and the National Congress of American Indians also strongly support the bill.

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