

Begaye meets with NM Indian Affairs Committee

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MENTMORE – President Russell Begaye gave the welcome address and provided a status update before the New Mexico Indian Affairs Committee July 19. The New Mexico Indian Affairs Committee Co-Chairs Representative Sharon Clahchischilliage and Sen. John Pinto both in attendance along with other members of the Committee.

Committee member Rep. Patricia Lundstrom, D-Gallup, has question for President Begaye after the welcome address and status update on Transportation, which was the agenda topic for this session.

Although, transportation was the topic Lundstrom provided additional information regarding the New Mexico States' Gold King Mine clean up initiatives. Within the update Lundstrom posed the question to President Begaye on "How can this committee assist the Navajo Nation with Gold King Mine?"

Begaye informed the New Mexico Indian affairs committee, "we have been promised a number of issues would be addressed by EPA region 9 such as on-site laboratory for testing soil and water, we also know that the baseline for contamination is set higher in other areas and on the Navajo Nation is shows differently."

"People no longer shopping with our famers due to suspensions contamination and they travel elsewhere, this has impacted the economy and will take years to recover," also stated Begaye.

"We have met with the New Mexico Office of Environmental Protection and entered into an

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agreement with them to help each other out with the Gold King Mine Spill,” Begaye added.

Begaye also informed the committee on the immediate addressing of the Child Abduction alert system task team implemented and the aggressive training the task team has started on this alert system.

“We have agreements in place with the State of Arizona and New Mexico on the Amber Alert System, training and implementation,” he said. “This system was put to the test when two young boys were abducted by their father and within a very short timeframe the alert was heard through out the Navajo Nation on numerous mobile phones, the boys were found and safely returned to family.”

Begaye was asked about the Coal companies and what was Navajo Nations plans.

He informed the committee that the tribe will continue to operate the mines, and have entered into a long-term agreement with Arizona Public Service. The tribe is paying off BHP and buying the mine. Just recently APS had retrofitted the generators, generators that were shut down for a long time and revenue were lost.

As it relates to Tribal Infrastructure Funds from the State of New Mexico, the Office of the President and Vice President of the Navajo Nation has an Executive Staff member Mark Freeland who has been working with the New Mexico Office of Indian Affairs on the Tribal Infrastructure Funds (TIF) as they fund community projects on the Navajo Nation and this has made a great impact in completion of projects, Begaye stated.

In closing Begaye told the committee, “We continue to work with the State of New Mexico on addressing projects such as the Red Valley school student transportation, safe school bus routes, reviewing shared gaming revenues into state coffers, Medicaid, social services and behavioral health and capital outlay programs.”