



JOE SHIRLEY, JR.
President

FRANK J. DAYISH, JR.
Vice-President

THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr. signs Diné Natural Resources Protection Act of 2005

New law bans uranium mining, processing throughout Navajo Nation

CROWNPOINT, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., today closed the book on a 65-year legacy of death and disease by making uranium mining and processing illegal on the Navajo Nation.

"As long as there are no answers to cancer, we shouldn't have uranium mining on the Navajo Nation," the President said after signing into law the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act of 2005. "I believe the powers that be committed genocide on Navajoland by allowing uranium mining."

The President signed the bill at the Crownpoint Chapterhouse before a crowd of 50 thankful elderly and young Navajos who have fought against uranium mining for a decade.

He said many Navajo medicinemen and women and hundreds of Navajo uranium miners have died as a result of exposure to radioactivity and uranium, whether by mining, dust, contaminated water or contaminated livestock. Many other families continue to live with this painful and deadly legacy of the Cold War, he added.

"I don't want to subject any more of my people to exposure, to uranium and the cancers that it causes," he said. "I believe we reinforced our sovereignty today."

The uranium prohibition is needed to address the deadly legacy of past uranium mining and processing on Navajo lands, and to protect the economy, environment and health of the Navajo people from future uranium mining and milling, the President said.

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Mitchell Capitan, president of ENDAUM, the Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining, said he was thrilled that the Navajo president and the Navajo Nation Council supported his 10-year effort to stop uranium mining in his community.

"I feel like the eyes and ears of the people have been opened," he said. "There are many people who are suffering from the effects of uranium mining. I don't know if the federal government will ever be able to compensate us."

Mr. Capitan said he began his work against uranium mining on Navajoland 10 years ago when he wondered why mining was again being planned for his community, a place where water is so precious and scarce. He said by then the harmful health affects of radiation exposure were already well-known and thoroughly documented.

Seeing that concern end with the signing of this legislation, he said, made the day historic.

"I can always tell my grandchildren that I did something to protect them, something that I am proud of," he said.

Concerns of protecting the area's underground water from radiation contamination was expressed by speaker after speaker during the brief ceremony and luncheon.

Lynnea Smith, a 21-year-old member of ENDAUM, said she was grateful to President Shirley who was patient, attentive, "and listened with all his heart" to the group's concerns shortly after becoming president two years ago. She said his support for the group's goals never wavered.

"This is the first time the Navajo Nation has take a huge step to protect the people and the Navajo Nation," she said.

She thanked all of the Navajo Nation Council delegates and gave special praise to the Southwest Research and Information Center and its long-time representative, Chris Shuey.

Norman Brown, president of Diné Bidzill, said thousand of Navajos are still affected by uranium-caused cancers and need help through the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act amendments now before Congress.

"Hundreds of mines still sit open to the wind and air," he said. "I have witnessed our elders crying and families pleading for some type of relief from the many cancer deaths that continue daily across our great Navajoland."

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