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PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Buu Nygren, Navajo Council Speaker Crystalayne Curley condemn today's unauthorized transport of uranium ore through Nation

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren this morning deployed the Navajo police to attempt to halt the illegal transportation of uranium ore from the Pinyon Plain Mine to the White Mesa Mill in southeastern Utah.

By the end of the day, he received a report that two trucks carrying the uranium ore had reached Utah.

“What was very disappointing today is that we were under the assumption that we would get 10 days or two weeks heads up if that this was going to happen,” he said. “Then, at the same time, we were made aware that transportation was not going to happen until October or November.”

The President said he learned at 11:30 a.m. today that the trucks were en route without notification from Energy Fuels, the owner of the Pinyon Plain Mine, that the transportation of ore was to happen.

“They snuck through the Navajo Nation and they made it onto the Utah side, outside of the reservation,” the President said. “To me, they operated covertly to travel the Navajo Nation illegally. It's very disappointing that they did that, that they smuggled uranium across our Nation which is very inappropriate.”

Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalayne Curley expressed the concern of the Council upon hearing the news.

“The Navajo Nation Council strongly condemn today's action by Energy Fuels Resources,” the Speaker said. “Our Navajo people have suffered for many years, and many lost their lives due to uranium mining on our homelands. The Navajo Nation will continue to oppose and fight against the transportation of uranium ore through our lands for the health and safety of our people.”

She said the Council will continue to strongly urge state and federal leaders to stand with the Navajo Nation and other tribes to stop the transportation of uranium ore.

Two trucks reportedly traveled from the mine south of Grand Canyon south through Tusayan, Ariz. to Williams where they continued on I-40 west to Flagstaff. From there they traveled north on U.S. 89 and entered the Navajo Nation at Grey Mountain. They traveled through Cameron, Tuba City, Kayenta to Mexican Hat, Utah, and on to the While Mesa Mill at Blanding, Utah.

Navajo Nation Council Delegate Casey Allen Johnson represents Cameron Chapter.

“The Navajo Nation has sacrificed so much for this country through the mining and processing of uranium ore extracted from our lands,” he said. “Energy Fuels Resources is threatening the lives and health of our people by transporting uranium across our land. We need President Biden, Governor Hobbs and our congressional delegation to stand up for the Navajo people and other tribes who are impacted.”

When President Nygren heard the news of the trucks transporting ore in violation of Navajo law, he wrote on his Facebook page to express his disappointment.

“The lack of notification to the Navajo Nation is a blatant disregard for our tribal sovereignty and exposes our Diné people to toxic uranium, a substance that has devastated our community for decades,” he wrote. “As president, I do not approve of this transport and will continue to fight to ensure our people are protected from the actions of Energy Fuels.”

In March, President Nygren and Speaker Curley wrote to President Biden to ask for his assistance to halt the transportation of uranium ore through the Navajo Nation.

“Mr. President, we urgently request the support of the White House to address this critical issue,” they wrote. “We ask you to explore all executive authorities at your disposal to halt the transportation of uranium through our lands. Furthermore, we implore you to publicly support a legislative solution that would reinforce the sovereignty of tribal nations, enabling us to enforce our laws and protect our people.”

Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch today said the Nation is in the process of developing regulations that would allow the safe transport of uranium across Navajo Nation.

“Even though there is a state right of way for some of the path that the trucks will be taking across the Nation, that doesn't mean that we don't have any right to regulate that territory,” she said. “It's still Navajo trust land. It's still Navajo sovereign territory.”

She said the Navajo Nation government and the Navajo President have the right and authority to protect the health, safety and welfare of the Navajo people.

“When it comes to uranium, that is something that we absolutely want to protect against in terms of additional radiation exposure for our community, and additional disproportionate burden of the legacy of uranium on Navajo Nation,” Branch said.

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