

**TESTIMONY
OF
TOMMY ROCK, PH.D.
BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON NATURAL
RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES
June 25, 2019**

Thank you, Chairman Grijalva, Chairman Lowenthal, Ranking Member Gosar and Members of the Committee, for inviting me to testify today. My name is Dr. Tommy Rock, and I am an environmental scientist from Monument Valley, Utah located on the Navajo Nation. I oppose any new uranium mining, and I will explain why. I have been involved in uranium research from 2006 and have seen the devastation this mineral can cause. Many Navajos have worked in uranium mining and milling and have passed on due to cancer. Such as my late grandfather Shone Holiday, who first served as a World War II veteran then worked at the mill. He died of bone cancer. He talked about the consent pain he was in. While I currently serve as a member of the Dine' Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission, my testimony today reflects my own views, and does not reflect the views or position of the Navajo Nation, the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency, or the Dine' Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission.

I oppose uranium mining because people who reside in the Puerco River Valley see higher incidents of cancer due to the high concentration of uranium in their groundwater. I discovered public water contamination in 2015 when we, working for the Tolani Lake Enterprise, got an environmental justice grant about past uranium mining and milling. The dam broke in July of 1979, and yet I still get emails from former residents of the area that have cancer saying, "why me?". I do not know how to answer them but I know the science is clear. The contaminated runoff from uranium mining has degraded the Puerco River and for decades has negatively impacted the people that rely on it. Not to mention, catastrophic events such as a breach in the dam from the Church Rock mill that spewed radioactive waste through the Puerco River watershed. This contamination from routine mill operations, unforeseen events and insufficient remediation of mining activities disproportionately affects tribal communities, and it must be addressed before any new uranium mine or mill is approved.

Comprehensive cleanup of a uranium mining operation is a near impossibility and once the operator of the mill is gone, the costs emerge in health impacts to the community and are often ultimately shouldered by taxpayers. There are currently 523 abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation alone, which demonstrates this is not a small, isolated issue but one that has widespread effects on our community.

Despite the fact that uranium mining on public land pays ZERO in royalties as long as the outdated 1872 Mining Law remains in place, somehow when weighed against the interests of the extraction industry and our opinion on future mining and the poisoning of my people is rarely considered.

The threat of uranium mining to a sacred landscape such as Bears Ears is very real. Currently, more than 200 uranium mining claims exist on lands illegally cut from the Bears Ears National Monument in 2017. Should domestic uranium quotas be enacted, these claims could become full-fledged mining operations, spreading contamination throughout the San Juan River watershed.

In one example, the Daneros Mine had been scheduled to permanently close and be remediated in 2025, but in February of 2018, the Bureau of Land Management approved the owner's plans to extend the life of the mine for an additional 13 years, increase production from 100,000 tons to half a million tons of ore, and expand the footprint of the mine tenfold. This type of rush to make public lands open for business will make our communities sick, discourage revenues from recreation and ultimately be the government's responsibility to clean up.

There are currently studies underway utilizing the traditional ecological knowledge to approach clean-up. This type of research looks at the different pathways of exposure using risk assessment, which is needed to fully understand the holistic risk. Native Americans have a different relationship with the environment where they use the whole environment and recognize the interrelationship of the environment with the people dependent upon it.

The Navajo people and all Indigenous people are being ignored both in our expertise in cleaning up the mess left by uranium mining when we are being most impacted, but we are also being ignored in our request to protect our lands from future uranium mining. Places like the Grand Canyon and Bears Ears are not appropriate for uranium mining now, and they never will be.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to questions.