

House Sub-Committee on Energy and Mineral Resources

**Oversight Hearing
“The Benefits of the Navajo Generating Station
to Local Economies”**

Testimony Submitted By:

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Thank you, Chairman Gosar, and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Marie Justice. Tsinnaginie is my clan born for Kiyaani. My maternal grandfather's clan is Deer water. My paternal grandfather's clan is Nakai di dine'.

I come before you as the President of United Mine Workers Local 1924, representing mostly Native American coal miners... their families, extended families and the many tribally-owned businesses that provide support services and rely on purchasing power generated by the Kayenta Mine and Navajo Generating Station. Mine and power plant workers are the backbone of the supply system for Arizona's energy and water that benefits millions across the state.

I grew up in LeChee on the Western part of the Navajo Nation, just outside of Page and very close to the Navajo Generating Station. It was only five years ago when electricity was brought to our area for the first time through a partnership with the power plant, the Navajo Transmission Utility Authority and the federal government. We still haul water and lack modern plumbing.

Working at the mine and power plant offer Dine' a way to remain on lands our families have used for generations. If these operations shut down a quarter century before Congress intended, the impact will be devastating.

As you're aware, the Kayenta Mine has provided fuel for the Navajo Generating Station nearly 45 years. The mine and power plant support 825 direct jobs, thousands of support jobs, and serve as a powerful economic anchor for tribal economies. Together they make up 85 percent of the Hopi Tribe's annual general fund budget and 22 percent for the Navajo Nation.

They also contribute hundreds of millions of dollars in economic benefits to regional economies each year and would contribute billions more under new ownership: A study from Arizona State University found that the mine and power plant would contribute \$13 billion in gross Navajo Nation product from 2020 to 2044.

Kayenta Mine alone generated \$440 million in direct and indirect economic benefits last year, which includes royalties, taxes, business payments, vendor contracts, and employee wages and benefits. These dollars flow through tribal

communities, supporting the basics like schools, government, health clinics, fire and police.

Mr. Chairman, so often we quantify the economic benefits of the Navajo Generating Station only in dollars and cents. I submit that the deeper issue is about the traditional working family and the work they do to benefit tribal people and families across Arizona.

Tribal families clearly have the most to lose if the plant is forced to shut down decades before Congress intended. Every chapter and every village across the Navajo and Hopi reservations will feel the impacts.

In looking at the impacts, we must recognize that many workers support their immediate and extended families with these jobs. For Navajo, this represents our children... our grandchildren.... grandparents... aunts and uncles... If these jobs go away, the impact to families is far more severe than most imagine. Many families will be torn apart.

I worry most about the children. Families will be totally disrupted with one or even two parents forced to travel away from their homes to find employment to support the lives they've grown accustomed to sustaining.

Children and grandchildren will miss out on advanced training for college or trade schools. This means the loss of educated professionals for tribal communities who are so critical to our programs. We cannot let this happen.

I was a young girl when the power plant was built. As someone who has raised two children, and now three grandchildren, the plant's environmental footprint is important. The plant is fueled with some of the highest quality low-sulfur coal available. In addition, about \$1 billion have been invested in environmental controls for the plant, resulting in one of the lowest emission profiles of any coal plant in the region.

Before coming to work at the Kayenta Mine, I worked at the Black Mesa Mine, a sister operation. The mine fueled the Mohave Generating Station, which shut down in 2005. It, too, was targeted by NGOs for closure.

The shutdown of Black Mesa meant more than \$25 million per year in royalty income was lost to the Navajo Nation. The cost of electricity went up for every Navajo family who had electricity – and put it out of reach for some who don't. Many long-term workers were forced to retire, others left their families to find work as far away as Virginia. Family fell apart, divorces went up, it was devastating.

As they were running their campaign to destroy the jobs at Black Mesa, the environmental NGO's made lots of promises about new jobs and new sources of income. But none of that came to pass. It was just another example of empty words from those who do not care about our families' ability to survive.

After the plant shut down and thousands of jobs were lost, a study by San Francisco State University and Berkeley Economic Consulting concluded, and I quote: "the authors found that virtually no evidence that closure of the plant improved visibility, or equivalently, that the plant's operation degraded it."

In other words, there was no perceptible visibility improvement when the plant shut down. My husband and I both lost our jobs along with thousands of others. For all the discussion about a transitional economy, not a single job was created by NGOs who had worked so hard to shut it down.

We cannot allow the past to become prologue. Mr. Chairman, and members of Congress, we ask you to support the ownership transition. Continue to engage Secretary Zinke in his leadership and support. Hundreds of thousands of Diné and Hopi are counting on it.

The mine supports 345 workers, and about 99 percent of our represented workforce is Native American. These are skilled, good paying jobs that are hard to come by. It is not uncommon for the mine to receive 150 to 200 applicants for *one* welder's position.

We, as members of the Navajo and Hopi Nations, want the American Dream that is about to be taken away, when we were had agreements with the federal government to run the plant for a 70-year life commitment.

Families will be torn apart, juvenile delinquency will run rampant, gang affiliation will explode leading to another devastation of the family. High school dropout numbers will soar while the daily wage for those lucky enough to have a job will be minimum wage or less creating an overload on the Government welfare system.

Mr. Chairman, with so much at stake, we ask you to continue doing everything you can to support the transition of the Navajo Generating Station by enforcing CAP's obligation to take NGS power. In turn, the plant will generate revenues from surplus power to enable repayment of over \$1 billion in debt to the federal government and U.S. taxpayers. Miners and power plant workers will keep their jobs, and the Navajo and the Hopi will maintain their important revenues.