

Joseph F. Hernandez

Community Organizer

Gadii'ahi-To'koi, Navajo Nation

Vice-Chair Navajo Nation Head Start Policy Council | New Mexico Energy Transition Act Commissioner | Navajo Allottee Heir-San Juan County

Date: July 11, 2023

To: The Honorable Pete Stauber
Chairman, Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources,
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

From: Joseph F. Hernandez
Community Organizer
Shiprock, New Mexico 87420
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RE: Opposition to H.R. 4374, the “Energy Opportunities for All Act”

Dear Mr. Chairman Stauber:

I am an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and a New Mexico San Juan County resident where my family and I hold the “Notah Sosa” allotment with the listed track number 23N 8W 36 in the Betonnie Tsosie Wash Unit. This is located south of the Nageezi Chapter House above the Escavado Wash and outside of the 10-mile protected radius (buffer zone) around Chaco Culture National Historical Park (CCNHP). Since my childhood I have always been told that we are from Chaco Canyon. My late mother Rita Cason always talked to me about our five times great maternal grandfather and grandmother who were forced at gunpoint by the United States Government to walk over 400 miles to Fort Sumner in what is known as the Long Walk. After the signing of the Treaty of 1868 my grandparents returned to their homeland “Diné Bikeyah” located within our Four Sacred Mountains. When they returned from Hwéeldi “Bosque Redondo” the United States Government only gave them a section of the land that today my family and I hold ownership of surface and mineral rights in a checkerboard region of different land status jurisdictions.

Today, we receive royalty payments from DJR Energy, a private upstream oil and gas company. These payments are never the same and are always different. Also, we have known that some Navajo Allottees receive substantial amounts of royalties, we are far from that and have always talked about building a house and a farm on our land there. We also understand that the allotment has a special land status and gives us allottees a unique relationship with the Secretary of the Department of Interior (DOI) who holds this land into Trust for us and future generations. About ten years ago the Navajo Nation pursued to get all of these allotment lands through the federal “Land Buy Back Program”. My family was offered a low market value that we would receive a one time payment for giving up our ownership. Many of my relatives came to the consensus to Not sell their land but to hold on to it. It was around this time that my family became aware about discussions between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), DOI, Navajo Nation, and the All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG) about establishing a mineral withdrawal for future oil and gas development around Chaco Canyon. Through numerous family gatherings this topic of a “buffer zone” came up and we talked through about where we stand on it. We all had our different reasons but we have had a consensus to support the land protection designation of a 10-mile “buffer zone”.

Furthermore, I have shared information to my family about Representative Crane Legislation H.R. 4374 the “Energy Opportunities for All Act” and I stand in solidarity with my family to oppose this legislation. My aunt Annie C. Begay told me “there have been many different oil and gas companies taking from the land but if you look around we have nothing in our community to show for it”. I carry her reason as well as many other Navajo Tribal members that we want to have a thriving community like other oil and gas producing communities. We have a once in a generation opportunity to make meaningful investments in communities like Nageezi to build homes and community centers. A library or even a laundromat to help give hope to many people. The opportunities that leadership of all levels should be working towards is securing energy democracy for all Navajos to ensure every house is electrified and has running water.

Ahéhee’

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph F. Hernandez", written over a horizontal line.

Joseph F. Hernandez