

Saving NGS means saving families

As proud parents, grandparents and members of the Navajo Nation, we naturally want to give to our children a good life while keeping families together. The value of family is universal to all people and all cultures.

Strong families create healthy communities and a vibrant nation. Yet the strength of our communities is at risk. It is increasingly clear that if the Navajo Generating Station shuts down a quarter-century before its time, tribal families would be hardest hit. I worry most about the children.

Parents would have to leave the reservation to find work. Children would not have their parents and grandparents with them every day and would lose their important family connections.

The Navajo Generating Station was developed on tribal lands by tribal workers with the mine and power plant providing revenues equaling 22 percent of the Navajo Nation's general budget and more than 85 percent for the Hopi. The operations also contribute hundreds of millions of dollars in direct and indirect economic benefits to regional economies each year, supporting schools, government, fire departments and police, in addition to the purchase of local goods and services from Navajo businesses.

As our leaders look at ways to maintain operation of the power plant for the financial security of the nation, they understand that the Navajo family is at the heart of the issue.

Speaker Lorenzo Bates has captured it best. He said that the real story is about the traditional working family and the work they do to benefit tribal people and families across Arizona. Last year, Bates sponsored legislation that finalized an agreement between the Navajo Council and the power plant owners to continue operations through 2019. Now the momentum has turned to supporting the transition of the plant to a new group of owners, which will keep it operating in the decades ahead. Credible buyers have expressed interest, and it's time to get serious about the transition.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke is leading the process, saying he is committed to working with all parties to keep the plant operational and to protect tribal jobs. A prominent global investment bank has identified interest from potential new owners, and these important discussions are continuing.

With so much at stake for our future, the United Mine Workers of America has brought together a powerful coalition of labor, industry and consumer groups that are advocating to keep the Navajo Generating Station online long term. The group is led by UMWA President Cecil Roberts and represents more than 100,000 U.S. businesses and organizations. It is dedicated to creating a transparent discussion that will inform communities and advocate solutions that could allow the Navajo Generating Station to operate well into the 2040s as envisioned when the plant was built by the federal government.

With the Navajo Nation, the Department of the Interior and other key stakeholders highly engaged, it's time for the current owners to step up support for the sale of the plant, take long-term power from NGS and fulfill their obligation to Navajo and Hopi people. Let's all join in the effort to protect our jobs, our families and our communities. It is time to say yes to NGS.

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