

Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva
“Community Impacts of Proposed Uranium Mining
Near Grand Canyon National Park”
Joint Hearing of the
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public
Lands and
Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals
Natural Resources Committee
City Hall, 211 E. Aspen, Flagstaff, Arizona
March 28, 2008
10 a.m.

The Subcommittee will now come to order.

Welcome to the hearing on “Community Impacts of Proposed Uranium Mining Near Grand Canyon National Park.” This hearing is a joint effort of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands and the Energy and Minerals Subcommittee, chaired by Congressman Jim Costa of California. Unfortunately, Mr. Costa could not be present today. I’d also like to thank my two distinguished colleagues, Congressman Ed Pastor and Congresswoman Grace Napolitano, for attending the hearing today. Their attendance speaks to the importance of the issue before us

I’d like to welcome our witnesses to the hearing today. We will be hearing testimony from tribal and local elected officials, business and environmental representatives, as well as experts on uranium mining. I also want to let audience members know that while we will not be taking public comment at this meeting today due to time constraints, the Committee will be accepting written comment for ten calendar days after the hearing. You may send written comment to subcommittee staff member

Domenick Carroll. His card will be available at the end of the hearing.

Today, we are going to examine the legacy of uranium mining on the people and environment of this region. Mining of this radioactive substance has not left behind a benign legacy, indeed many people already having perished or are very sick from the byproducts of mining or processing. We will also look at the Forest Service's policy of allowing exploration for uranium to proceed under what are known as categorical exclusions from the National Environmental Policy Act, which results in very limited environmental analysis and even less public involvement or notice. I have serious concerns about the Forest Service's use of these categorical exclusions for this type of activity and I would like to hear from them and other witnesses about why this is or is not appropriate.

This hearing will also bring out issues related to the reform of the 1872 Mining Act. This law was passed by Congress at a time when the country was expanding and the government wanted to lure settlers West under the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. As should be obvious to most, the values embodied in this bill, such as giving public resources away for free without regard to the impact on the environment, are no longer valid.

It is Congress's responsibility to reform this law that is seriously past its prime. Yet, the idea of extracting minerals for free from our public lands seems to be a difficult one to undo and efforts over the years to reform this law have failed. The House last year passed a bill that would reform this outdated and harmful law and help bring management of our federal lands into the 21st century but the bill remains stuck in the Senate. For the time being, our federal lands

and the people who live near them will continue to suffer the consequences of a law that is seriously out of step with the modern world.

While the reform effort dallies, claims in our national forests and on public lands are skyrocketing. In particular, uranium claims around the Grand Canyon National Park are spiking. There were only 10 claims within 5 miles of the Park in 2003; as of July 2007, there were 1,130. In 2003, there were only 35 claims within 10 miles of the Park, but as of Jan. 2007, there were 2,840. These statistics should give us pause.

Two weeks ago I introduced legislation that would withdraw 1 million acres of federal land surrounding the Grand Canyon from further mining activities. While this bill will not prevent current mining claims, it will protect these treasured areas from future mining claims. I feel this step is necessary to prevent further degradation of the environment of the Canyon and especially to protect the people who live in and near the Canyon from the dangers of this radioactive metal. The legacy of uranium mining is still not behind us and until we have learned to safely mine and process this material, this is no place to be moving forward with new mines.

I look forward to hearing from all of all our witnesses today.

I'd now like to turn to my colleagues Mr. Ed Pastor and Mrs. Grace Napolitano for any opening statements they may have.

I'd now like to invite up our first panel of witnesses.

