

Navajo lawmakers to vote on tribal superfund law

ALBUQUERQUE (AP)—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency cleaned up contaminated soil on properties near an abandoned uranium mine in Church Rock last year after Navajo officials spent years trying to persuade the federal agency to do so.

Navajo EPA officials hope that cleaning up such sites won't take as much time in the future. The Tribal Council is to vote next week on a bill—similar to the federal Superfund law—that would allow Navajo officials to monitor and remove all hazardous substances, pollutants and contaminants that could endanger the health and safety of residents.

"This is our approach to provide us with some authority simi-

lar to what the state and federal government have in response to dealing with hazardous waste," said Navajo EPA executive director Stephen Etsitty.

U.S. EPA officials say the federal government still would work to clean up sites on the reservation, but the tribal law would allow the Navajo EPA to identify and take action on sites that are not always of federal interest.

"There's so many sites and issues to be dealt with that obviously the more people you have tackling it, bringing tools to bear, the better," said Michael Hingerty, deputy branch chief in the EPA's Office of Regional Counsel in San Francisco. "The EPA is only ever going to be able to get to a fraction of the problems. Ev-

ery bit helps."

The law would serve the same purposes as the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, known as the Superfund law. The Navajo Nation has adopted a list of chemicals the federal government uses to determine whether a site is hazardous and added petroleum to that list.

"This added flexibility should help avoid disputes over the application of the act to various and environmental public health threats," the proposed tribal law states.

Like the Superfund law, the tribal legislation places responsibility for the cleanup on current and past owners of sites or those who arrange for haz-

ardous substances to be brought onto the Navajo Nation.

If those responsible cannot immediately be identified, the tribe would use funding generated by a tariff on transporters of hazardous waste to clean up the site and seek reimbursement when possible, said Freida White, senior environmental specialist for the Navajo EPA. The amount of the tariff hasn't been decided.

It's also not known when the tribe could begin cleaning up sites.

Of particular interest to tribal officials is the cleanup of more than 1,000 abandoned uranium mining sites that have left a legacy of disease on the reservation that extends over parts of New Mexico, Arizona

and Utah.

"A lot of people have been affected in respect to their health," White said.

The U.S. EPA is working with the Navajo Nation and a number of federal agencies to develop a 5-year action plan to address the environmental effects of uranium mining on the reservation.

A spokeswoman for the agency, Wendy Chavez, said the EPA will test 75 water sources and 100 structures this spring, and those found to be contaminated will be considered for cleanup under the federal Superfund program.

Chavez said the agency also is working with tribal officials to clean up mining sites ranked highest for environmental risk,

starting with the Northeast Church Rock Mine near Gallup.

The tribal Superfund measure is on the council's agenda for its winter session, which begins Monday in the Navajo capital of Window Rock, Ariz. Delegates George Arthur, the chairman of the council's Resources Committee, and Curran Hannon are sponsoring the legislation.

The council's Judiciary, Resources and Ethics and Rules committees have passed the measure, although committee approval is not required for the bill to reach the full council.

The tribe has been working on drafting the legislation for more than a decade, and White said she is hopeful it will pass.

"Oh, I know it will," she said. "There's a need for it."

Indian leader says Republican meeting chance to open dialogue

HELENA, Mont. (AP)—A tribal chairman picked to headline the Montana Republican Party's winter meeting says the GOP will have to work to take American Indian voters away from Democrats.

But James Steele Jr., chairman of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribal council, said Democrats can no longer take the tribal vote for granted.

Steele is scheduled to speak at Saturday night's banquet of the Montana Republican Party's winter kickoff in Bill-

ings. He said it's important that Republicans are stressing more dialogue with tribes and their leaders.

"I think it's a realization of the importance of the Native American vote in the last few elections, and especially in the last election," Steele said. "I think the Democratic Party has reached out to Native Americans in a variety of ways ... that the Republican Party has not really done."

Montana GOP Chairman Erik Iverson said Republicans are reaching out to voters on reservations. He said the Repub-

lican Party in the past didn't try hard enough to talk to American Indian voters about the party's message.

"Part of the problem for Republicans is that we just didn't show up," Iverson said.

The chairman was elected last summer with vice-chairwoman Liane Johnson, a member of the Blackfoot Tribe.

Iverson said the Republican fiscal conservative message featuring lower taxes will work on reservations like it does everywhere else. And he said the Republican platform can help deal with problems on reservations

such as high unemployment.

At the same time, Steele can talk to Republicans about the success he has had in building coalitions in winning elections, Iverson said.

"We've got to end this era of confrontation in Helena, what we saw from both sides last legislative session," Iverson said.

Democrats said Republicans will need to deal with issues important to Native Americans if they hope to succeed, rather than by opposing initiatives like Indian Education for All such as some Republican lawmakers have in the past.

"We appreciate any support in carrying the load and being of assistance to the Native American communities," said Art Noonan, executive director of the Montana Democratic Party. "We hope the outreach and sincerity doesn't end when chairman Steele leaves the building."

Steele said he is not partisan. He said he has voted for both Republicans and Democrats.

And he believes all elected leaders can learn from the job Gov. Brian Schweitzer has done in reaching out to American Indians.

"He set the bar for political

leaders in Montana; if you really want to get things done in Montana you have to reach out to everyone, and that includes Indian people in Montana," Steele said.

He said Republicans are taking a "step in the right direction."

"But you are not going to get Native American people to overnight start voting for the Republican candidates," Steele said. "It will take time."

"It will take time understanding the Native American issues."

Flag from American Indian occupation of Alcatraz sold at auction

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—A flag believed to have flown when a group of American Indians occupied Alcatraz nearly 40 years ago sold for \$69,000 at an auction Thursday.

The flag was sold to an unidentified private collector, said Bruce MacMakin, senior vice president of PBA Galleries in San

Francisco where the flag was sold. It wasn't clear how big a role the flag had in the 1969 protest. Some participants of the occupation said they didn't recall the flag and were dismayed at the idea of it being sold for profit.

"I think that's a stretch, to call that historic," said Adam Fortu-

nate Eagle Nordwall, one of the organizers of the 19-month occupation.

"When I look at the picture of that flag, it really doesn't do anything to me as an artist, or as a Native American. It really is not symbolic of the Indian cause."

But MacMakin said the seller

provided detailed documentation, including a 1970 photograph from the San Francisco Chronicle that showed it flying on Alcatraz and a snapshot of the woman who designed the flag handing it over to be raised. "It was just fascinating," MacMakin said.

Known to many as "The

Rock," home to a now-closed federal penitentiary, Alcatraz also was the site of three American Indian occupations, the longest and best-known of which began on Nov. 20, 1969, when organizer Richard Oakes led a group of supporters to the island.

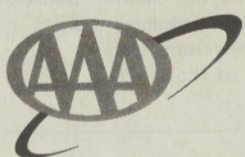
The protest got massive at-

ention and drew thousands of American Indians from around the country.

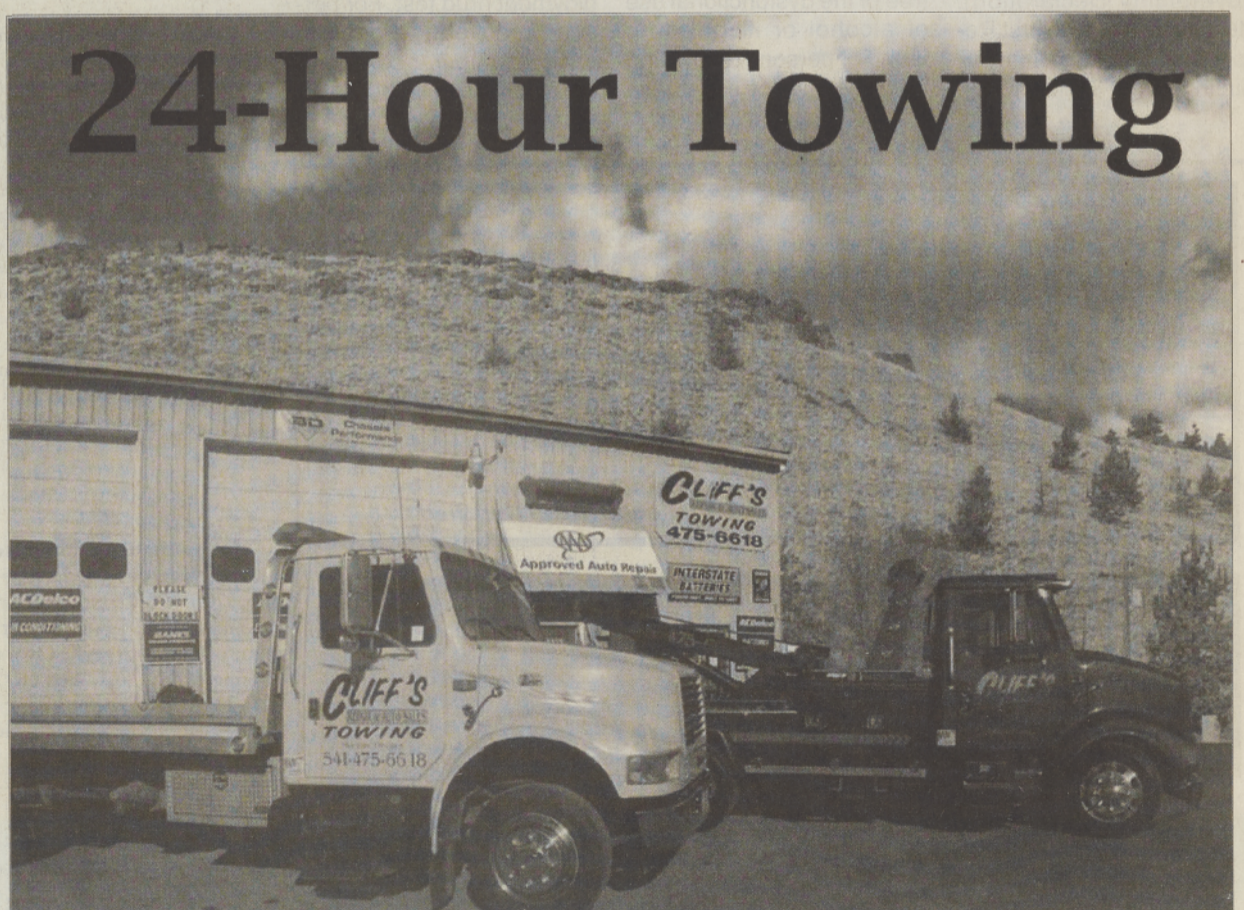
The occupation ended in June 1971, but the movement it inspired continued, inspiring a new era of American Indian activism.

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