

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 17, 2015

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On August 5, 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) accidentally released three million gallons of hazardous mine wastewater into the Animas River in Silverton, Colorado. This toxic plume entered San Juan County, Utah on Monday and continues to cause immense disruption.

On Tuesday, August 11, and Wednesday, August 12, both the Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Utah Governor Gary Herbert declared a state of emergency. We write to support our state leaders and request that you help them resolve this disaster.

In response to the spill, small towns turned off water pumps and allocated 25 gallons of water per family per day.<sup>1</sup> Native American farmers fear they will be unable to feed their isolated communities if their crops wither without water from the San Juan River.<sup>2</sup> Lake Powell, the destination for this toxic sludge and a popular recreational location, will unavoidably see its visitors decline. These are just a few of the many anecdotes we are hearing from our constituents.

Given the severe impact of the EPA's actions on Utahns, we expected a swift, coordinated response to mitigate the damage the federal agency caused. Unfortunately, the EPA failed to contact the state of Utah within twenty-four hours of the spill. This reckless behavior is intolerable. In the future, the EPA's state outreach efforts should be corrected to reflect the time-sensitive nature of the response required by these sorts of accidents.

With much more work to be done, we ask that the EPA and other relevant federal officials continue to better coordinate with our governor and state agencies. The federal government must implement a more transparent and efficient cleanup effort if it is to aid Utah's scientists and make our communities whole again.

It is important that the federal government work transparently with the Utah Division of Water Quality to continually monitor the state of the San Juan River. The current

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<sup>1</sup> Green, Mark. "Water Turned Off in Two Small Utah Towns Due to Contamination from Colorado Mine." *Fox13now.com*. 8 Aug. 2015. Web. 13 Aug. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Bolerjack, DJ. "Mine Toxins in Water Has Navajo Community Praying for Quick Solution." *kutv.com*. 11 Aug. 2015. Web. 13 Aug. 2015.

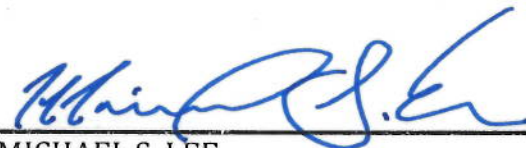
ambiguity surrounding the severity of the toxic spill is stoking fears; only once we know the scope of this disaster can Utah properly respond. This will require significant time and financial resources from the states; it is expected that EPA will cover those costs incurred by the affected states.

In the immediate-term, Utahns that anxiously await the results of these tests must be guaranteed access to potable water. The federal government should act as a backstop if state, local, or county governments cannot adequately supplement water lost due to the EPA's spill.

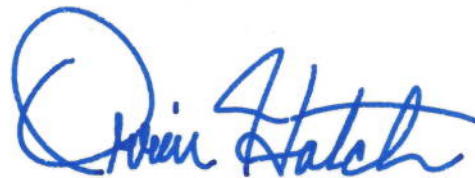
In the long-term, the federal government must ensure that the state and local governments forced to spend money protecting their citizens are adequately and quickly compensated. Cash-strapped local communities should not be forced to pay for the EPA's mistake. The final claims reimbursement process the EPA implements should also include local businesses and agricultural producers that are also affected by this toxic spill.

We look forward to working with you to cleanup the San Juan River and to help stabilize the communities harmed by this toxic spill.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL S. LEE  
United States Senator



ORRIN G. HATCH  
United States Senator



ROB BISHOP  
Member of Congress



JASON CHAFFETZ  
Member of Congress



CHRIS STEWART  
Member of Congress



MIA LOVE  
Member of Congress

cc: Gina McCarthy, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency