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Carson asks Inhofe to attend town meeting

By K.E. Sturgeon III

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Saying residents of Picher and Cardin deserve a chance to talk directly with the U.S. senator who has developed a plan to clean up the contaminated mining district that surrounds them, Congressman Brad Carson asked Sen. Jim Inhofe Monday to attend a town hall meeting in Ottawa County.

“Congressman Carson has asked and the people of Picher and Cardin have asked that Sen. Inhofe join them in holding a town hall meeting to explain his position on Tar Creek,” said Brad Luna, Carson’s communications director.

Inhofe, chairman of the Senate’s Environment and Public Works Committee, has recently proposed a phased cleanup of the Tar Creek Superfund site, a 40-square mile abandoned mining district that threatens to contaminate the area watershed, undermine homes and businesses, and pose a health hazard through lead dust that blows off chat piles and into the air.

Carson has criticized the plan saying that residents of Picher and Cardin who live at the epicenter of the hazardous site should be moved away immediately. Carson’s buyout plan seems to be favored by most residents. A survey of public utility users has indicated that 85 percent favor some form of a buyout.

Carson said Monday that he would join Inhofe in any town hall meeting, an event that area residents have asked for repeatedly.

“I’m committed to going any place, any time, anywhere to meet Sen. Inhofe and sit down and talk with the people of Tar Creek,” Carson said. “I personally believe that at the very least they deserve to have their elected officials sit down, face-to-face, and defend proposals about their future.”

Jerod Young, a former Inhofe aide who is deputy communications director for the committee chaired by Inhofe, said the senator has developed a plan that will solve the problems faced by residents of Tar Creek.

“The senator is going to achieve results by working with Gov. Brad Henry and other leaders from the Tar Creek area on a solution that is scientifically sound,” Young said.

But, in a statement issued by Carson, the congressman wondered how the senator could have arrived at a scientifically based solution if his staff held beliefs expressed in area newspapers last month.

The congressman's office provided three quotes from area newspapers that they said were inaccurate and misleading. In disputing statements apparently made by aides, Carson pointed out that:

- On housing values, an Inhofe aide was quoted as saying that property located within a Superfund site would be very low. In his statement Carson said that according to federal law regulating buyouts property would be valued as though it was not in the Superfund site.
- A statement by an Inhofe aide that a buyout would cost between \$500 million and \$6 billion did not have "technical expertise to back up" the claim. Carson said that based on similar federal relocations, the cost of moving Picher and Cardin's approximately 1,200 residents would range between \$50 million and \$100 million.
- An Inhofe aide said that most area residents don't want to be bought out or relocated. Carson pointed out that surveys have shown that a great majority of residents favor a buyout.

"Residents of Picher and Cardin, ground zero of the Tar Creek Superfund site, have stated definitively that they desire a relocation or buyout for their town," Carson said.