



The 21st Navajo Nation Council

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Council delegates lobby Utah State Legislature, Gov. Herbert during American Indian Caucus Day

SALT LAKE CITY – The Utah State Legislature along with the Utah State Office of Indian Affairs hosted the American Indian Caucus during its 45-day session at the Utah State Capitol. Utah tribal nations including the Navajo Nation were present at the caucus.

The Navajo Nation lobbied the state for support in major issues relating to the creation of a cabinet-level office for Native American affairs; a two year extension for House Bill 352; another extension for the land exchange agreement between the State Institution Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) and Bureau of Land Management (BLA); and support for a \$32 million public safety project for Aneth and the surrounding areas.



Top: Navajo Delegates Maryboy and Filfred meet with Brent Everett, branch manager of Utah DEQ. **Bottom:** Navajo Delegate Davis Filfred (left) speaks with Utah Gov. Herbert.

In an effort for the state to better understand the needs of tribal nations, it was suggested the Utah Legislature establish a cabinet-level office specifically to address Native American affairs.

Council Delegate Kenneth Maryboy (Mexican Water/Aneth/Red Mesa) agreed with other tribal nations on this matter and said, "My position has always been and will continue to be the creation of a Native American cabinet in Utah."

Sen. Kevin Van Tassel agreed to more cooperation between the state and tribes and vowed to make visits to Indian Country in Utah.



"I think that one issue is to make the state legislature go down to the southern end of the state and by going down there we will get a good idea of what's going on," said Van Tassel.

In other lobbying efforts, Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water/Aneth/Red Mesa) recommended a two-year extension for House Bill 352. The bill includes phasing out Utah Navajo Trust Fund operations such as funding for capital projects, health and scholarships, which delegate Filfred feels are important to his constituents.

The extension of the bill would allow for the construction of unfinished Sunset Projects to occur such as providing necessary housing for the constituents in the Utah portion of the Navajo Nation.

Another major concern the Navajo Nation shared with the Utah legislators was an extension on the 65 acre land exchange between SITLA and the BLA. The land exchange would add 65 acres to the Utah portion of the Navajo Nation near Montezuma.

Environmental assessments conducted by SITLA determined 20 acres in the land exchange is contaminated based on the Utah Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) standards. The contamination is deemed un-harmful by SITLA.

Clarence Rockwell, executive director of the Navajo Utah Commission, expressed the need for state interference of the SITLA land relinquishment and said, "SITLA did hire a consultant to conduct an environmental study and found there is contamination that is not harmful. The BIA is saying otherwise. The idea of this land exchange is to get SITLA lands into tribal trust."

In order for lands to be in tribal trust, lands will need to be free of contamination which is a Bureau of Indian Affairs regulation.

The Navajo Utah Commission, along with Filfred and Maryboy, have considered processing the land claim of 45 acres, which is not contaminated, and asked for state support in getting a compromise on the win-win situation of adding new lands to the Utah-Navajo side.

"The state can order issues to Utah environment assessment standards based on the type of contamination, but we don't know if our state standards meet federal standards," said Brent Everett, branch manager of Utah DEQ. "All the entities involved have different standards, so a meeting of all parties would probably need to happen to be comfortable."

Council Delegate Rex Lee Jim, chairman of the Public Safety Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council, was also present. He lobbied the state for support and informed the legislature of a \$32 million public safety project in the Aneth area.

"The proposed project at Aneth will consist of a one-stop center, which is a much needed infrastructure for Aneth and the surrounding areas. We need your support with this project – the project will be approximately \$32 million," Jim explained. "We are hoping Governor Herbert and the Utah Legislature will help support this need."

The proposed facility includes an entire public safety and judicial complex and is similar to those located in Kayenta and Dilkon, Ariz., on the Navajo Nation.

In other related efforts, the session with Gov. Herbert was optimistic as he expressed Utah's continual efforts of the government-to-government relationship and informed the tribal delegation of the upcoming Native American Summit.

The summit is scheduled for Aug. 31 – Sept. 2, 2010 and will address Utah's tribal issues in greater detail.

The Governor was pleased with the tribal delegation turnout and said, "I thank you. We can do this again. We can do this during the Native American Summit. Thank you for being here and good luck to you."