



## The 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council

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## **Gov. Bill Richardson visits Navajo Nation, meets with Speaker Morgan, Navajo Council**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson made a surprising visit to the Navajo Nation on March 5 before signing several legislations during a special bill-signing ceremony at the Gallup-McKinley County Courthouse in Gallup, N.M.

Gov. Richardson was in Window Rock to give Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan and members of the Navajo Council an update on Native American-specific bills and he also thanked the Navajo Nation for working with the state during its budget shortfall.

New Mexico Secretary of Indian Affairs Alvin Warren, Deputy Secretary of Finance and Administration Rick Martinez, State Rep. Sandra D. Jeff and key staff members from the state of New Mexico accompanied Gov. Richardson.

The governor updated the Navajo Nation on the progress of capital outlay projects.

"It is my last year as governor and I wanted to leave a legacy," Richardson said. "Progress has been made on capital outlay projects..."

Just a few weeks ago, the capital outlay projects across the state, including those on tribal lands were being questioned due to New Mexico's budget shortfall. However, thanks to lobbying efforts from the Navajo Nation and state legislators, Senate Bill 182 passed the state legislature with some Navajo projects being saved.

Senate Bill 182 totals approximately \$17 million in capital outlay projects. Capital outlay projects range from improvements to chapter houses, preschools, road improvements, health care services, supplying electricity and other basic needs for a better quality of life for Navajos living in the New Mexico-portion of the Navajo Nation.

Gov. Richardson also reported the state legislature passed House Bill 162 on March 4; this bill was sponsored by House Speaker Ben Lujan. This legislation makes the Tribal Infrastructure Fund (TIF) a permanent fund to help tribes and pueblos across the state fund tribal infrastructure projects from severance tax bonds. The bill was originally enacted in 2005 by Gov. Richardson.

"From now on, 5% of these severance tax bonds will go to the tribal infrastructure fund," Richardson explained. "About \$10 million every year will go to the fund. In a good economic year, there could be more than \$10 million for tribes and pueblos for capital outlay projects. For this fiscal year, \$2.5 million will go into the tribal infrastructure fund."

"My main message to you and to the Navajo Nation government is that we move these projects expeditiously and rapidly," Richardson added. "Progress has been made. But I urge you as Council Delegates to do all you can to push the process forward."

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The governor also updated Speaker Morgan and the Council Delegates of SB 107, the Indian Arts and Crafts Crimes Consistencies bill; HB 90, which is the Native American Dual Credit Program; and HB 264, which is legislation related to an Indian Law Institute for New Mexico State Legislators.

Council Delegate Alice Benally (Crownpoint/Nahodishgish), as well as many other Council delegates praised Gov. Richardson and members of the state legislature for their efforts to save funds for the Navajo Nation.

"I very much appreciate the services from the state of New Mexico," Benally said. "I am so appreciative and thankful for the funding of our Navajo Nation Senior Centers and other funding sources to help our communities. I thank you for your presence here today."

Council Delegate Young Jeff Tom (Mariano Lake/Smith Lake) reminded the governor of projects needing completion, such as funds to improve road access in the Mariano Lake Chapter area and he also expressed words of gratitude.

"We want to thank you for your eight years -- eight years ago you came to Ramah Chapter where we, the Navajo Nation, endorsed you. You will always be governor," said Tom.

As a token of appreciation, members of the Navajo Nation Council presented a turquoise medallion to Gov. Richardson.

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