



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Navajo Nation Council meets with Arizona's top leadership

**WINDOW ROCK** – Members of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Navajo Nation Council on Friday, met with top officials from the State of Arizona including U.S. Sen. John McCain, Gov. Doug Ducey, State Sen. Carlyle Begay (Dist. 7) Speaker of the House David M. Gowan, Sr., Senate President Andy Biggs, Secretary of State Michele Reagan, and State Sen. Don Shooter (Dist. 13), to continue building on a foundation for partnership between the Navajo Nation and the State of Arizona by addressing issues that are critical to both sides.

The issues discussed during the hour-long meeting included Transaction Privilege Tax revenue, water rights, Former Bennett Freeze Area, law enforcement, education, and Navajo language preservation.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) and Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), chair of the Council's State Task Force, said the meeting was held to provide the state's leadership with an overview of some of the Navajo Nation's top priorities and to continue having an open dialogue with state and federal leadership.

"We recognize that the issues before us are complex and will take time to address, but it's important to maintain face-to-face dialogue between the Navajo Nation and state and federal officials," said Speaker Bates, who also noted that since taking office in January, Council has emphasized and progressed in strengthening relations with top leadership in the states of Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Speakers Bates also thanked Sen. Begay for his vital role in coordinating with state and federal officials to arrange Friday's meeting, which provided each of the Council's Standing Committees a platform to share their priorities and recommendations.

Vice chair of the Budget and Finance Committee Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill), outlined the tremendous inequity associated with the distribution of the state's Transaction Privilege Tax revenue.

Delegate Witherspoon pointed out that in 2014, the Navajo Nation contributed more than 55-percent of the overall TPT revenue collected from all 21 Arizona tribes which totaled \$25.3 million, but that the Nation only received \$2.6 million of the revenue when the state distributed the revenue.

"We're contributing a significant amount, but getting back a very small portion," stated Delegate Witherspoon, emphasizing the need for consistent revenue to address the basic needs of the Nation.

"Our people used to be a very self-reliant and very independent society. In the last hundred years we've gone from that independence to a state of great dependence," added Delegate Witherspoon, while requesting state leaders to consider changes to the TPT laws at the next legislative session in January.

Speaking as the chair of the Law and Order Committee, Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) requested Senate hearings at the federal level to advocate for increased funding for law enforcement on the Navajo Nation.

“As you know, we’ve had several killings of officers on the Navajo Nation,” said Delegate Yazzie, while noting that back-up response time for Navajo police can range from 40 minutes to one hour, as opposed to 15 minutes for state, county, and city law enforcement officers.

“On behalf of the LOC, I request to have a hearing with the U.S. Senate and [the Bureau of Indian Affairs] on this issue. It will be a cause well worth fighting for,” Delegate Yazzie said.

Resources and Development Committee chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), touched on the importance of securing the Nation’s water rights as a basis for economic development. He also mentioned that the proposed water rights settlement voted down by the former Council in 2012, contained language that was very concerning to the Nation.

“We want our economy to reach a point to where we don’t have to go to Washington D.C. every year to advocate for benefits,” said Delegate Shepherd.

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) advocated for the development of charter schools on the Navajo Nation and to provide opportunities for students to learn the Navajo language in public schools.

He also urged state leaders to address school boundary issues that often hinder Navajo students and force them to travel hours to and from school each day due to school district boundaries.

“Education is the key to prosperity and we want to collaborate on these issues moving forward,” stated Delegate Hale.

In response to inequities over TPT revenue distribution, Gov. Ducey stated, “There’s too much inequity in it. It doesn’t benefit the economy and it’s something that we’re eventually going to deal with.”

Sen. McCain and Gov. Ducey said they are open to beginning a dialogue with the Navajo Nation concerning its water rights. Sen. McCain also emphasized the process to begin negotiations must be initiated by the Navajo Nation in the form of a formal letter.

“The governor and I are committed,” said Sen. McCain. “I pledge to you that we will do everything we can.”

They also said they continue to monitor and to receive daily briefings concerning the contamination to water in the northern portion of the Navajo Nation caused by the contamination spill at Gold King Mine.

“We know it hasn’t affected the State of Arizona, but it has affected the Navajo Nation. We’ll continue to monitor and see what actions we need to take,” said Gov. Ducey.

Sen. McCain, the state leaders, and Council said they will maintain open communication and continue to meet to address the issues.

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