



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council Delegates advocate for federal funding for the completion of Navajo Indian Irrigation Project

WASHINGTON D.C. – Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland), members of the Resources and Development Committee, and officials from the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry met with U.S. Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Kevin Washburn on Friday, to advocate for federal funding for the completion of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project —located south of Farmington on the Navajo Nation.

NAPI is a Navajo Nation owned enterprise that farms the NIIP resources which were created through a 1962 Congressional bill, P.L. 87-483, and obligated the federal government to provide funding for the planning, designing, and construction of 110,630 acres of irrigable land to development commercial farming as a way of promoting economic development.

The NIIP resources resulted from an exchange of 110,000 acre feet of water from the San Juan basin for the Chama Diversion Project which has been completed.

During Friday’s meeting, Speaker Bates told Asst. Sec. Washburn that the obligations of the federal government are long overdue and that the Navajo Nation continues to lose revenue each year due to the lack of funding to complete the project.

“The Nation’s position is that we want NIIP completed as soon as possible,” said Speaker Bates, who was joined by Council Delegates Alton Joe Shepherd, Walter Phelps, Leonard Tsosie, and Davis Filfred.

Delegate Shepherd, chair of the Resources and Development Committee which serves as the oversight for NAPI, said the completion of NIIP is a top priority for the Nation and called for improved communication and relations with the Department of the Interior.

“We are serious about getting this project completed,” stated Delegate Shepherd, emphasizing the economic potential that would benefit the Navajo Nation in terms of revenue and jobs.

According to NAPI CEO Tsosie Lewis, the total cost to complete the NIIP exceeds \$700 million. Officials have also pointed out that annual federal funding has decreased over several decades from over \$25 million to its current allocation of \$3.5 million.

Lewis said he wants NAPI to have a stronger partnership with the BIA and recommended that the first step should be to fund a portion of the NIIP known as Block 9, which is estimated to cost \$290 million for completion.

Since its creation in 1970, NAPI continues to produce a variety of agricultural products such as potatoes, corn, alfalfa, beans, barley, wheat and oats under the brand name of Navajo Pride.

“At the end of the day, we want the federal government to fulfill its obligation to fully-fund the NIIP in accordance with P.L. 87-483,” concluded Speaker Bates, while noting that the Council will continue to lead the initiative and to continue meeting with federal officials to secure funding.

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