



# 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Delegates urge federal officials to fund the completion of Navajo Indian Irrigation Project for Navajo Agricultural Products Industry**

**WASHINGTON D.C.** – Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd, President Russell Begaye, and acting CEO of Navajo Agricultural Products Industry Lionel Haskie, met with the Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Mike Black, last Wednesday to further 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, which obligated the federal government to provide funding for the planning, designing, and construction of 110,630 acres of irrigable land to develop commercial farming to promote 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 was completed in 1976 to benefit of non-Navajos while the NIIP project remains incomplete to this day.

Speaker Bates and Delegate Shepherd emphasized that annual funding for NIIP construction has declined from \$25 million, to \$12.5 million, to a current low of \$3.3 million. They also stated that the Nation needs clear answers regarding the future outlook for federal funding in order for the enterprise to plan properly.

“Is there a number out there?” asked Speaker Bates. “We need to know in order to plan accordingly because it impacts the entire operation including future investments.”

Delegate Shepherd urged federal officials to be open and upfront regarding future funding.

“We want to see progress and we need to roll up our sleeves and tackle this issue,” said Delegate Shepherd, who chairs the Resources and Development Committee, which has oversight authority over NAPI.

To date, NIIP construction only remains 75-percent complete and it is estimated that will cost over \$700 million to complete the project, which includes Blocks 9, 10, and 11 – each consisting of 10,000 acres of land.

“We need to have an idea of how many acres we need to plan for in the short and long term,” stated Haskie. “The completion is achievable, but it hasn’t happened yet.”

In response, Black acknowledged that securing funding would be a challenge and that the federal Office of Management and Budget would have to be involved. He also recommended the reformation of a NIIP technical working group, which was previously established decades ago but no longer exists under the current administration.

BIA Navajo Regional Director Sharon Pinto, recommended that each entity determine who would represent them as part of the working group and emphasized the need for a federal OMB representative to take part.

At the conclusion of the meeting, each party agreed to meet again in January following the reformation of the working group and identifying who will serve in its capacity.

Earlier this month, Speaker Bates introduced Legislation No. 0382-15, supporting NAPI's efforts to contract the remaining construction of the NIIP under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. The bill continues to make its way through the legislative process.

Navajo Nation officials previously met with Black and U.S. Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Kevin Washburn, in July to begin advocating for the NIIP funding.

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