



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Speaker Bates advocates for Navajo issues at Congressional level

WASHINGTON D.C. – Last Thursday, Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) held a series of meetings in the Nation's capital to advocate for the Former Bennett Freeze Area, funding for the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project, water rights, and the reauthorization of housing funds through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In one-on-one meetings with U.S. Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM), U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM), and U.S. Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ), Speaker Bates asked for their support to reinstate a line item within the federal budget for the Former Bennett Freeze Area.

A line item was designated for the area in 2012 under President Obama's Budget-Strengthening Trust Natural Resources Tribal Priority Allocation line item, which has not been funded in recent years. The budget line item was created to complete the Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP), which is currently in the 30-percent draft review.

"The 12,000 plus Navajo people living in the 1.5 million acre area are in great need of roads, water lines, power lines, and other infrastructure needs and we have requested the BIA to assist in re-establishing this particular line item," stated Speaker Bates.

Prior to the meeting, Speaker Bates delivered a letter to U.S. Asst. Sec. of Indian Affairs Kevin Washburn and the co-chairs of the Tribal Interior Budget Council, who held a meeting with numerous tribes to discuss the ongoing formulation of BIA budgets. In the letter, Speaker Bates outlined the history and needs of the FBFA and urged the officials to reinstate the line item.

During the meeting with Sen. Udall, Speaker Bates briefly addressed the Gold King Mine spill which impacted communities represented by the senator. He requested the senator's continued support in providing accurate and timely information regarding the compensation process to ensure that individual Navajo people receive full compensation for losses incurred due to the spill.

In a meeting with U.S. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) and President Russell Begaye, items discussed included the FBFA and Navajo water rights issues relating to providing clean water to more Navajo people in the state of Arizona.

Federal funding for the completion of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project was also a topic of discussion in each of the meetings, in which Speaker Bates urged the Congressional members to

support funding for the completion of 110,630 acres of irrigable land to further develop commercial farming at the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry site located south of Farmington.

The NIIP was created through a Congressional bill in 1962, which also obligated the federal government to complete construction of the project, however, to date approximately only 75-percent of the project has been completed and estimates show that over \$700 million is needed for completion.

“The project began over five decades ago and yet we continue to lose out on potential revenue because it remains incomplete,” said Speaker Bates, adding that uncertainty over future funding does not allow NAPI officials to plan and invest long term.

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