



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 18, 2016

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Speaker Bates highlights water and sanitation projects, water rights, and state issues on opening day of Spring Council Session

WINDOW ROCK – On the opening day of the 2016 Spring Council Session, the 23rd Navajo Nation Council unanimously accepted a report from Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) with a vote of 16-0.

Speaker Bates began the report by thanking and congratulating his Council colleagues, the Síhasin Fund Sub-Committee, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, Navajo Water Management Branch, Indian Health Service, and many others who played a role in the passage of a historic legislation that provides \$180 million for 60 water projects and nearly 50 sanitation system projects in each of the five Navajo agencies – this marks the largest spending package ever approved by the Council.

“While there remains a great deal of work to be done, I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who assisted in this successful effort,” stated Speaker Bates. “Síhasin Fund Sub-Committee chairman Delegate Leonard Tsosie, vice chair Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye, and sub-committee members continue to work aggressively to complete the preliminary steps to ensure the funds are used in the most efficient manner, while ensuring accountability.”

The Council unanimously approved the funding in late January, which uses a portion of the \$554 million settlement award from the federal government, to fund a five-year plan that will use approximately \$101 million for over 60 water projects and an additional \$79 million for nearly 50 sanitation system projects.

In his report, Speaker Bates also touched on the issue of securing water rights in regards to the Little Colorado River, while also acknowledging the challenges and complexities that are certain to be part of negotiations.

“No one will disagree that water not only gives life to our people, but it also allows our communities to thrive economically. In order to have businesses, public safety, homes, and other components that serve as the foundation for communities, we must first have basic infrastructure in place such as electricity and water sources,” Speaker Bates stated.

As a result of a meeting held on March 16 between President Russell Begaye, Hopi Chairman Herman G. Honanie, and Speaker Bates, each tribe established a negotiation team to come to terms on an agreement concerning the LCR between the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe. He also noted that Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichí, Steamboat), who chairs the Resources and Development Committee will represent the Council on the Navajo Nation’s negotiation team.

On March 30, Delegate Shepherd, President Begaye, Chairman Honanie, and Speaker Bates met with state and Congressional leaders as well as Arizona non-Indian water users to discuss the preliminary steps and procedural matters that are required to initiate official negotiations.

“As I have previously stated, I remain confident that my Council colleagues and I will carefully evaluate our options and seek a settlement that is fair and just for our people and our communities,” added Speaker Bates.

In regards to state issues, Speaker Bates thanked Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) for his leadership and guidance in the recent months as the State Task Force met with several top officials from the states of Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico during their legislative sessions.

State Task Force members along with Speaker Bates met with 10 New Mexico senators and representatives as well as Gov. Susana Martinez on Jan. 22, to advocate for funding for capital outlay projects and reauthorizations.

“It was anticipated that requests for capital outlay projects and capital outlay project reauthorizations would be scrutinized due to budgetary constraints for the state of New Mexico based on revenue projections for FY2017,” stated Speaker Bates.

Speaker Bates reported that the combined efforts of the State Task Force, New Mexico senators and representative, Office of the President and Vice President, Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, and various chapter officials, led to the approval of over \$2.5 million for capital outlay projects for chapters in New Mexico.

Gov. Martinez also signed S.B. 122 - General Obligation Bond Projects in which she authorized \$174.4 million worth of projects while vetoing \$10.9 million worth of projects. The Authorized projects will appear on the ballot in November’s general election in the state of New Mexico.

On Monday, Speaker Bates also thanked the second grade class from Wide Ruins Elementary School for singing the National Anthem and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in the Navajo language, and the Chinle Veterans Organization for posting the colors at the start of the session.

To view the full report from Speaker Bates, please visit:

http://www.navajonationcouncil.org/pressReleases/2016/APR/18APR2016_Speaker_Report_to_NNC_Spring_Session.pdf.

Speaker Bates also provided the report on local radio stations, which will air throughout the week.

To listen to the report, please click the following link:

<http://www.navajonationcouncil.org/AudioReleases/2016/Speaker%20Bates%20-%202016%20Spring%20Session%20Report.mp3>.

The Navajo Nation Council will convene for the second day of the Spring Council Session at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday to receive a report from officials with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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