



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 5, 2016

MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

State Task Force to move forward on addressing Utah education concerns

LEUPP, Ariz. – The Naabik'iyátí' Committee's State Task Force met last Thursday, to discuss the recent approval of Senate Bill 14 by the Utah State Legislature during its most recent legislative session that ended on March 10, which was later signed into law by Utah Gov. Gary Herbert.

SB 14, entitled "American Indian and Alaskan Native Amendments" sought approximately \$2 million on an ongoing basis beginning in fiscal year 2017, to implement a pilot program to fund stipend, recruitments, and retention of teachers who teach in Native American schools. However, the final bill only approved \$250,000 for the pilot program.

Task Force member Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels), who also chairs the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee, brought the matter to the attention of the State Task Force. He acknowledged that little can be done now that the legislative session has concluded, but wanted the task force's input to determine how the Nation can proceed in securing funding to help schools with a high number of Navajo students.

Delegate Hale sponsored Legislation No. 0061-16, seeking Council's support for SB 14, which Delegate Hale said he will continue to push through the legislative process to establish the Nation's official position.

"The legislative session has ended in Utah, but we still need to establish an official position on behalf of the Nation to advocate in the future for funding to help educate Navajo students in the state of Utah," said Delegate Hale, who added that the Navajo Nation Board of Education is also expected to consider a resolution supporting the funding request.

State Task Force members met on several occasions with top state leaders to advocate for funding and other initiatives, however, members said they understand that many other educational programs and initiatives also received limited funds or no funding at all.

"We should view the \$250,000 as a starting point to build on, and down the road we hope to see the educational initiatives fully funded," Delegate Hale added.

State Task Force chair Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) recommended that the Nation take a proactive approach by educating Utah state leadership of the needs of the schools and educators so that they have a better understanding when the legislature revisits funding for education.

Delegate Begay acknowledged that schools in Arizona and New Mexico are also in great need of additional funding and resources for students and educators, as noted by several education advocates who were also in attendance.

The advocates said that many Navajo students in the state of Utah lack classroom space, which often leaves teachers to hold classes in hallways and other areas of school facilities. They urged Council members to visit the schools to gain a firsthand perspective of the conditions.

At the conclusion of the meeting, State Task Force members along with Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) agreed to strengthen correspondence and advocacy efforts with state leaders, particularly those who serve on the education and appropriations committees.

###

For news on the latest legislative branch activities, please visit www.navajonationcouncil.org or find us on Facebook and Twitter, keywords: Navajo Nation Council