



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council moves to acquire additional funds to supplement \$180 million water and sanitation system projects

“Our people do not want to wait 20 or 30 more years for water”

WASHINGTON D.C. – Members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council spent two days on Capitol Hill meeting with Congressional leadership to advocate for federal funds to assist with water projects and sanitation system projects. The meetings were held following the approval of \$180 million by the 23rd Navajo Nation Council and President Russell Begaye, which is the Navajo Nation’s largest spending package ever approved.

Council members applauded Monday’s approval of resolution CJA-12-16, which was unanimously supported by the Council on Jan. 28 and provides \$101 million for over 60 water projects and \$79 million for nearly 50 sanitation system projects in communities across the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegates Leonard Tsosie, Walter Phelps, Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Nathaniel Brown, and Seth Damon took part in the meetings with key Congressional leaders that sit on the Appropriations Committee from both the House and the Senate. They also met with top officials from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Office of Management and Budget, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Delegates met with U.S. Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM), who represents a portion of the Navajo Nation and sits on the Senate Appropriations Committee, U.S. Rep. Christopher Stewart (R-UT) who is a member of the House Appropriations Committee, U.S. Rep. Michael Simpson who is also a member of the House Appropriations Committee and chairs the subcommittee that funds BOR and Army Corp of Engineers, and U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) who is a member of the House Appropriations Committee.

Delegate Tsosie, who sponsored the legislation and chairs the Síhasin Subcommittee that was tasked with developing the expenditure plan, informed Congressional leaders that the Navajo Nation is ready to move forward with the projects and seeks assistance from the federal government through supplemental funding and to expedite regulations that would speed up the completion of the projects.

“Our people do not want to wait 20 or 30 more years for water,” said Delegate Tsosie to Congressional leaders. “They have told us that they want water to their homes and their communities and we are here to see how the federal government can channel more federal funds to help construct the projects.”

Delegate Phelps, who represents several communities in the Former Bennett Freeze Area and chairs the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, pointed out that some of the \$180 million would

benefit the FBFA and also asked the Congressional leaders to support H.B. 3911 sponsored by U.S. Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ), which requests technical amendments to the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute Settlement Act to allow for more efficient streamlining of policies and regulations to promote development. He also asked Congressional leaders to provide approximately \$125,000 through the Army Corps of Engineers and to reinstate funding to BOR in accordance with the Rural Water Supply Act of 2006, which has not been funded in recent years.

“Federal agencies appear to be encouraged that the Navajo Nation has committed funds for certain major water conveyance projects in an effort to provide potable water, serve health care needs and economic development initiatives. It is good to have an opportunity to have meaningful conversations with several federal agencies and congressional leaders to help us identify opportunities to leverage the funds,” stated Delegate Phelps.

Delegate Crotty also emphasized the water needs due to contamination of water in several Navajo communities caused by decades of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation.

“Honoring the Navajo people’s mandate for investment in water infrastructure, Navajo leadership invested over \$180 million into water infrastructure,” stated Delegate Crotty. “Our job now is to work with Congressional leadership to convey our water needs clearly and to seek federal funding to compliment and leverage our funds.”

The funding for the projects was made available through a historic agreement signed in September 2014 that ended the Navajo Nation’s lawsuit against the United States over the mismanagement of trust fund assets and awarded the Navajo Nation \$554 million.

The resolution also requires the Nation to seek maximum leverage of the funds through funding from federal, state, or private entities through match funding, joint funding, contribution funding, cost-share funding, bond financing, or other agreements to subsidize the cost of the water and sanitation system projects.

Other members of the Síhasin Subcommittee include Council Delegates Seth Damon, Nathaniel Brown, Walter Phelps, Jonathan Perry, Otto Tso, Nelson S. BeGaye, Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Mel R. Begay, Lee Jack, Sr., Tom T. Chee, and Davis Filfred.

Subcommittee chair Delegate Tsosie said the projects lay a foundation for community development and eventually economic opportunities. He added that the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee will produce additional expenditure plans to address economic and community development and education opportunities as mandated by the Navajo Nation Breach of Trust Settlement Act of 2014.

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