



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 1, 2016

MEDIA CONTACTS

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

Council members meet with key officials on education, repatriation of sacred items, and amending the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act

WASHINGTON D.C. – Last week, members from the 23rd Navajo Nation Council attended several meetings with federal officials and programs to discuss educational issues, repatriation of sacred items, and proposed technical amendments to the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act.

Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) along with staff from the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education and members of the Navajo Nation Board of Education, met with officials from the U.S. Department of Education, Bureau of Indian Education, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to discuss the Navajo Nation Alternative Accountability Workbook.

The Alternative Accountability Workbook was submitted in 2009 to the U.S. Department of Education requesting flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The primary goal of the workbook is to unify three different state accountability assessments for all BIE funded schools on the Navajo Nation, as opposed to using three different standards and assessments as the Nation currently does.

“The Navajo Department of Diné Education and Navajo government have worked rigorously to have our [Alternative Accountability Workbook] accepted,” said Delegate Hale. “Our aim is to improve educational outcomes for Navajo children and close achievement gaps through quality curriculum and instruction, as well as become our own state educational agency.”

Delegate Hale and DODE also advocated for additional funding to construct and renovate schools in need of repair or replacement, and to hold the federal government accountable to the educational needs of the Navajo Nation.

In addition to the education meetings, Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinoñ, Whippoorwill) and Delegate Hale attended a consultation meeting with the U.S. Department of State and other federal entities on the repatriation of sacred cultural items in an effort to protect them from further theft and illegal sales within the U.S. and abroad.

“If we can gain support from federal entities such as the Department of the Interior and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, we have the opportunity to advocate for the creation of federal laws to protect and repatriate sacred items and have resources allocated to these efforts,” said Delegate Witherspoon.

Delegate Witherspoon suggested that a conference be developed to include the FBI, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. DOI, and affected tribes, to begin addressing repatriation of sacred items and protection of sacred sites on a national scale through the unification of tribal nations.

Delegate Witherspoon also met with U.S. Sen. Jeff Flake's (R – AZ) office to discuss H.R. 3911, a Congressional bill that seeks technical amendments to the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act, which was introduced in Nov. 2015 by U.S. Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D – AZ).

The technical amendments would allow for the selection of lands within 18-miles of all Navajo Nation lands and would correct a survey error by BLM of approximately 757-acres of land that went to the Navajo Nation. It would also allow Navajo families residing on Hopi-partitioned lands interested in relocating to receive eligibility for relocation and benefits, and establishes the Navajo Tribe Sovereignty Empowerment Demonstration Project, according to the legislation.

"We hope to garner support from the U.S. Senate to introduce a senate bill that supports the technical amendments and allow for hearings for issues and concerns, and ultimately to approve the amendments," said Delegate Witherspoon.

Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi Tó'ii), who serves as the chair of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, commended Rep. Kirkpatrick and thanked Council members for their continued support of the Congressional bill.

"I am grateful to Congresswoman Kirkpatrick for her support in dropping the bill last fall. I'm also appreciative to my colleagues for their advocacy in making it possible in moving bills in Congress. Our hope is to get hearings conducted by Congress soon," said Delegate Phelps.

For more information on the legislation, please visit www.congress.gov and search for H.R. 3911.

###

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