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Delegate Walter Phelps highlights Western Navajo Agency concerns with Congressman Tom O'Halleran

TUBA CITY, Ariz. – On Tuesday, Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) met with Congressman Tom O'Halleran (D – AZ), along with President Russell Begaye, regarding the Former Bennett Freeze Area, broadband fiber optics for Tuba City Regional Health Care Center, Bureau of Indian Affairs natural resources funding, road conditions, public safety, and economic development within Western Navajo Agency.



PHOTO: Council Delegate Walter Phelps meeting with Congressman Tom O'Halleran (D – AZ) at Tuba City Regional Health Care Center on Aug. 15, 2017.

“The western region of the Navajo Nation has many unique challenges. The region experienced the Navajo-Hopi land dispute, which relocated many Navajo citizens. Citizens also endured harsh consequences from the Former Bennett Freeze Area. No construction or development could occur without the prior consent of the Hopi Tribe. This region needs critical attention,” stated Delegate Phelps, who serves as the chair of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission.

President Barack Obama lifted the Bennett Freeze in 2009 by signing into law Senate Bill 39, which repealed the freeze.

Delegate Phelps added that due to the development freeze, many residential homes fell into despair, deterioration and became uninhabitable. Approximately 62-percent of existing homes in the area still lack water, electric power, and improved roads, said Delegate Phelps.

In response to the Congressman's question regarding funding for the area, Delegate Phelps said that the Nation has been utilizing funding provided through the Native American Housing Assistant and Self Determination Act.

"A major challenge the Nation faces when building homes for residents is the low income threshold set by the Housing for Urban Development NAHASDA program. Because of the lower threshold, individuals and families who would qualify for public housing assistance in non-tribal communities do not qualify for these same federal funds. This is not fair for tribal members and it needs to be changed so the Nation can build more homes," added Delegate Phelps.

The discussion also focused on increasing the Federal Highways Tribal Transportation Program, the Indian Community Development Block Grant program, and BIA Integrated Resource Management Plan funds, which are all used to address infrastructure services and projects.

Prior to the meeting, Congressman O'Halleran toured the Tuba City Regional Health Care Center, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit health care corporation governed by a board of directors under the PL-93-638 Indian Self Determination Act, which highlighted tribal healthcare funding, AZ Senate Bill 1092, specialty care – oncology, inclusion of Native American Tribes for Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation projects, and the need for fiber optic broadband.

"We hope to work closely with Congressman O'Halleran to address the many concerns within western agency," stated Delegate Phelps.

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