



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council advocates for increase in federal funding to complete the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project

LEUPP, Ariz. – On Thursday, members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council attended the Tribal Interior Budget Council's weeklong meetings regarding the upcoming federal FY2018 proposed budget to advocate for increased funding to complete the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project, for operations and maintenance costs, and to appropriate additional funds for deferred maintenance.

The TIBC provides a forum and process for tribal governments and federal officials to work together in developing annual budget requests for Native American programs within the U.S. Department of the Interior, and educates and advises tribes regarding the federal budget process. The TIBC held its council meeting at the Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort from July 24-27.

On July 24, the Navajo Nation Council's Resources and Development Committee approved Resolution RDCJY-75-17 with a vote of 4-0 to support the Naabik'íyáti's NIIP Negotiation Subcommittee to advocate for increased federal funding to complete the project.

Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) and Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye presented RDC's supporting resolution to the TIBC and requested an additional supporting resolution from the budget council to advocate for a budget increase for the NIIP to the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Delegate Begay said that due to the processes within TIBC, they were not able to pass a supporting resolution, but were encouraged to provide a comprehensive supporting letter to the TIBC that would be attached to the budget proposal. The letter was provided to the budget council the same day that included the RDC and NAPI supporting resolutions.

"I hope with the recent establishment of the Naabik'íyáti' NIIP Negotiation Subcommittee and our participation at the TIBC meeting, we will put this particular issue back on the table for further discussion. We have to look into why NIIP wasn't completed and address this to our Congressional leaders," said Delegate Begay. "Although we were hoping for a supporting resolution, the support letter will be a significant aiding tool."

Delegate Begay thanked the Office of the President and Vice President for their support and said they will continue to push for increased funding to complete the NIIP.

In 1970, the Navajo Nation established the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry to operate and manage the NIIP, an 111,000-acre irrigated industrial agri-business company. Over the years, the annual funding level for NIIP construction was reduced from approximately \$25 million to \$12.5 million per year.

According to Navajo Nation Council Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, T'iis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland), beginning in FY2012 the annual funding level for the NIIP decreased to \$3.3 million, in which the reduction of funding has prevented the full development of the NIIP Block 9, which limits NAPI's ability to farm nearly 73,000 acres.

"I am respectfully requesting the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other federal agencies for support of an increase in Congressional appropriations for the Navajo Nation to complete construction of the NIIP, per Public Law 87-483," said Speaker Bates.

Speaker Bates added that not only is the completion of the NIIP important, but the federal government must also provide support funding for the operations and maintenance costs of the project.

The letter to the TIBC states that construction on the NIIP started in 1974 and has completed construction on eight blocks for NAPI to farm. Originally, the NIIP was estimated to be completed in 12 years, however, federal funding to complete the remaining three 10,000-acre blocks of NIIP is wholly inadequate, the letter states.

In addition to funds for new construction, the unavailability of operations and maintenance funding is resulting in the gradual deterioration of existing infrastructure by creating a large deferred maintenance backlog. As a result, NAPI and the Navajo Nation have been forced to work with Congress to re-program construction funding to the O&M account, the letter states.

"The Navajo Nation will continue to urge that the NIIP construction funding be restored to a reasonable level. We forecast that there will be an increase in food demands over the next 40 years as global populations rise. The NIIP has a secure reservoir storage supply in the amount of about 1.7 million acre-feet intended to supply water to the NIIP, and thereby making water available for NAPI's economic growth, which we must capitalize on," said Speaker Bates.

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