



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **Council members address Navajo Generating Station, Little Colorado River settlement, and healthcare funding with Arizona Governor Ducey**



**PHOTO: Council Delegates Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Dwight Witherspoon, Jonathan Hale, and Speaker LoRenzo Bates meet with Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey at the Arizona State Capitol on May 23, 2017.**

**PHOENIX** – Speaker LoRenzo Bates along with Council Delegates Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Dwight Witherspoon, and Jonathan Hale met with Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey at the Arizona State Capitol on Tuesday, to advance several issues including the future of the Navajo Generating Station, ongoing negotiations with the Hopi Tribe over Little Colorado River water rights, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, and wireless network services for first responders.

Speaker Bates informed Gov. Ducey that he anticipates the introduction of legislation this week that will allow the Navajo Nation Council to determine whether or not to allow the Navajo Generating Station to remain in full operation until the end of 2019. He further explained that the legislation will have to be considered by several of the Council's Standing Committees prior to final consideration by the full Council.

During the meeting, Speaker Bates requested the support of Gov. Ducey's office by considering an exemption on the state's Transaction Privilege Taxes that are placed on coal production and sales from Kayenta Mine, which is the sole provider of coal for the Navajo Generation Station. He added that the exemption would be one component that may help coal prices compete with the current price of natural gas.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon and Speaker Bates also told Gov. Ducey that the Navajo Nation would seek to secure the rights to approximately 50,000 acre-feet of water that is currently used by Navajo Generating Station for operations, if the power plant closes. Delegate Witherspoon has been a strong advocate for obtaining the rights to the water for Navajo communities that would stand to benefit from the water.

"If NGS closes, it will impact the state of Arizona tremendously," stated Speaker Bates.

In regards to a potential Little Colorado River settlement Speaker Bates said the Council's negotiation subcommittee, chaired by Council Delegate Walter Phelps, has been meeting with the Hopi Tribe to reach an agreement before a proposal is presented to non-Indian water users and the state of Arizona.

Council Delegate Jonathan Hale, who serves as the chair of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee, requested Gov. Ducey's support to exempt all members of the Navajo Nation from S.B. 1092, which requests waiver language to require AHCCCS beneficiaries to become employed, actively seek employment, or to attend school or job training. The Naabik'iyáti' Committee opposed such language through a resolution sponsored by Delegate Hale, citing the lack of employment opportunities on the Navajo Nation.

Gov. Ducey's senior policy advisor said the Governor's Office did receive the resolution passed by the Naabik'iyáti' Committee along with many public comments, which are being reviewed in order to develop fairer language.

Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. informed Gov. Ducey that the Council's State Task Force is pursuing the implementation of FirstNet communications networking to benefit first responders on the Navajo Nation. FirstNet is the first nationwide, high-speed, broadband network dedicated to public safety, which was established through the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act, passed by Congress in 2012.

"FirstNet provides each state the option to opt in or out of the program and we want to make sure the Navajo Nation is not left out of this plan when it is put together," stated Delegate Begay. "We want to be part of the discussion."

Gov. Ducey said that his staff will review the requests put forth by the Council and determine how to proceed, which includes meeting with leadership from the Navajo Nation once again to revisit the issues and work toward solutions.

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