



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 18, 2017

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Flagstaff officials convey support for addressing border town issues with the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK – Last Thursday, Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) welcomed city of Flagstaff Mayor Coral Evans, along with three members of the Flagstaff City Council to the Office of the Speaker, where they discussed the importance of building a stronger partnership to address border town issues and concerns that impact Navajo people in the city of Flagstaff and surrounding Navajo communities.



PHOTO: (left to right) Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission director Leonard Gorman, Flagstaff City Council member Jim McCarthy, Flagstaff Mayor Coral Evans, Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Flagstaff City Council member Eva Putzova, and Flagstaff City Council member Charlie Odegaard at Veterans Memorial Park in Window Rock, Arizona on Sept. 14, 2017.

Mayor Evans and Flagstaff City Council members Jim McCarthy, Eva Putzova, and Charlie Odegaard, requested to meet with Speaker Bates and Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission director Leonard Gorman, to continue dialogue on issues such as the regulation of alcohol sales, auto dealership practices, and the desecration of the San Francisco Peaks in Flagstaff.

Gorman noted that a Memorandum of Understanding between the Nation and the city has served as the cornerstone for how the two sides interact and associate as “good neighbors.” He also acknowledged that there remain real concerns and challenges despite the fact that Navajo people continue to be a strong contributor to the city of Flagstaff’s economy.

The Human Rights Commission, under the legislative branch, has played an important role in bringing cultural and social awareness to towns that border the Navajo Nation. Gorman stated that the commission continues to offer cultural sensitivity training to law enforcement officers

and has recently submitted a list of potential Navajo candidates to fill police officer positions within the city of Flagstaff.

The commission is also working to address the fact that Navajo people, particularly elderly people, are often taken advantage of by car dealerships in border towns.

In regards to alcohol sales, Mayor Evans said she agrees that businesses need to be responsible and comply with regulations when selling alcohol to consumers. The officials also stated that the city is seeking support from Coconino County on proposed changes to laws that regulate alcohol, in order to present a stronger position at the state legislature in the upcoming session in January.

Mayor Evans also emphasized that the views and perspectives of the current city council members differ from past members, adding that there is a clear understanding and appreciation for social justice among the members. The mayor also stated that she believes the city council is moving in the direction of establishing a day to honor indigenous people, however, she said the members also want to “do their homework” by meeting with tribal leaders in order to become more aware and educated on issues that affect Native Americans in Flagstaff.

Gorman said the city officials and tribal leaders need to come together and communicate often and effectively, if they are to resolve issues such as the desecration of the sacred mountain known as San Francisco Peaks.

City Council member Eva Putzova, said she has gained a stronger understanding of the cultural and religious significance of the San Francisco Peaks for Navajo people through several forums that the city has participated in along with a group known as the “Indigenous Circle,” which is comprised of an intertribal group of Indigenous people in the city of Flagstaff.

Putzova also added that she does not agree that the economic benefits of the Snowbowl ski resort should outweigh the harmful impacts of using reclaimed wastewater to produce artificial snow on the sacred mountain.

Speaker Bates told the mayor and city council members that the Navajo Nation Council has made it a priority to strengthen partnerships with local, state, and federal governments to work together on issues such as those that are affecting Navajo people in border towns. He directed the office of the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission to serve as the point of contact to continue working toward solutions that benefit the city of Flagstaff and the Navajo Nation.

At the conclusion of the meeting, both sides agreed to continue meeting and collaborating to help the people of the Navajo Nation and the city of Flagstaff.

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