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Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. presents housing funds for the Former Bennett Freeze Area

TÓ NANEES DIZI – During the Western Agency Council meeting held on Saturday, members of the Navajo Nation Council presented nearly \$255,000 to the Tonalea/Red Mesa Chapter, to carry out a pilot project to construct 10 homes in the Former Bennett Freeze Area.

Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai'biit'ó, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake), who sponsored the bill to secure the funding from the Navajo Nation's Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance, said the initiative is very important for the community of Tonalea and signifies another step in the rehabilitation process for the Former Bennett Freeze Area.



PHOTO: Council Delegates Tuchoney Slim, Jr. and Otto Tso along with Vice President Jonathan Nez, presents funding for approximately \$255,000 to construct 10 homes in the Former Bennett Freeze Area in Tuba City, on Sept. 16, 2017.

The Navajo Nation Council approved resolution CJA-05-17 in January, during the Winter Council Session. Since then, Delegate Slim has worked with the chapter and various entities to ensure that the funds were properly disbursed to begin construction.

“The check presentation is the first of its kind to build homes for the Former Bennett Freeze Area. This is the result of great communication and collaboration with the chapter officials and community members. This is only the beginning and we will continue to develop within the Former Bennett Freeze Area,” stated Delegate Slim. “The families that live within the FBFA deserve these homes because they waited many years for opportunities of improvement and development.”

Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi), who also represents several communities that are impacted by the Former Bennett Freeze, said that more advocacy and support is needed for the families that reside in the area.

“The Former Bennett Freeze Area is an extensive amount of land that lacks infrastructure and suitable homes and Navajo leadership needs to continue to address these concerns at the federal level. There are many entitlements to the families that live in the area that are unaddressed by the federal government,” stated Delegate Tso.

Delegate Slim added that the project would not have been possible without the strong leadership and advocacy of the Tonalea Community Development Committee and Tonalea Chapter officials, who were also present. He noted that he expects the construction of the homes to begin soon.

When the Council approved the funding in January, Navajo-Hopi Land Commission chair Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To’ii), said the pilot project was a well thought out initiative that could not have been achieved without the cooperation of the community and the Navajo Division of Community Development.

Delegate Phelps added that what “sold” the initiative to Council is that the community demonstrated strong matching funds, which is a true example of self-determination and self-governance at the chapter level.

In 1966, commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Robert Bennett ceased development of approximately 1.6 million acres of land that was in dispute by the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe, which prohibited Navajo families from making any improvements to their homes or to construct new homes in the area for nearly 50 years.

Congress passed the Navajo-Hopi Settlement Act and in 2009, and former U.S. President Barack Obama officially lifted the freeze on development in the area, allowing for residents to begin constructing and rehabilitating homes and facilities.

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