



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 14, 2017

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Navajo Nation Council members advocate for tribal unity at Utah Tribal Leaders meeting



Photo: Council Delegate Tom Chee addresses the Utah Tribal Leaders regarding issues related to education for Native American students in Pocatello, Idaho on Aug. 11, 2017.

POCATELLO, ID – Members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council participated in a two-day Utah Tribal Leaders meeting last week, which was hosted by the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. Several issues were discussed including the Bears Ears National Monument, Utah Governor’s Native American Summit, educational issues, and road infrastructure development.

The Utah Tribal Leaders group is comprised of elected tribal leaders from an array of tribes within the state of Utah. Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) serves as the vice chair for the UTL and is the designated representative for the Navajo Nation. Council Delegates Herman Daniels, Jr. (Shonto, Naa’tsis’áán, Oljato, Ts’áh Bii Kin) and Tom Chee (Shiprock) also participated at the UTL meetings.

Delegate Filfred and Bears Ears advocacy group Utah Diné Bikayah provided a presentation to the UTL that included an explanation of boundaries and the potential effects of the U.S. Secretary of

Interior's proposed recommendation to reduce the designated land area within the Bears Ears National Monument.

"Again, I want to express my appreciation for the Utah tribes standing in solidarity in supporting the protection of the Bears Ears National Monument. We are not seeking to negotiate the current designation, and we are ready to litigate if Congressional action seeks to impede on our rights to our ancestral land areas," stated Delegate Filfred.

He added that Sec. Zinke has yet to reach out to the affected tribes to talk about the national monument, and said that the U.S. Department of the Interior cannot provide a comprehensive recommendation because they do not understand the significance of the Bears Ears area and its cultural importance to surrounding tribes.

The Bears Ears National Monument encompasses approximately 1.3 million acres of land—sacred to the Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe, and Zuni Nation. Delegate Filfred serves as a commissioner on the Bears Ears Tribal Commission, which was established through the monument designation proclamation.

Delegate Filfred also expressed concern regarding the Utah Governor's Native American Summit, which is held annually to allow tribes to come together and meet with the Utah Governor to discuss critical issues impacting tribes. This year's summit was a one-day event, and Delegate Filfred said that the summit should return to a two-day event to provide ample time for all tribes to meet with Utah leadership.

"As one of the many tribal leaders who had the opportunity to meet with the governor, it's important that Utah continue improving its relations with Utah tribes. It starts with making time for government-to-government collaboration and creating a space for leadership to have meaningful conversations. The Utah leadership needs to understand where tribal leadership is coming from, what issues are important to them, and what solutions the state can aid with," said Delegate Filfred.

In addition to the discussion, Delegate Chee expressed his concern regarding education issues in the Utah Navajo area, and stressed the need to support students within their home life and academics, and said the UTL provides the opportunity for tribes to work together to improve education for Native American students.

"Language and culture are important tools for Navajo, and Native American students alike to succeed. I understand the state of Utah is aiding in closing the achievement gap within their schools, and I urge them to work closely with the tribes," said Delegate Chee. "In turn, we as Native parents also need to remember our responsibilities to our children and encourage them everyday."

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