



24th Navajo Nation Council

Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation leadership advocates for Navajo priorities at Utah American Indian Caucus Day



Utah and Navajo Nation leadership sign an agreement on the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act on Feb. 4, 2019. Top row left-right: Utah Lt. Governor Spencer J. Cox, Navajo Nation Council Delegates Vince James and Charlaine Tso, Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes, Navajo Nation Council Delegates Nathaniel Brown, Herman Daniels, and Rickie Nez. Bottom row left-right: Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer and President Jonathan Nez, Utah Governor Gary Herbert, and Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon.

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Vice President Myron Lizer, Speaker Seth Damon, and several council delegates delivered the Nation’s priorities to Utah Governor Gary Herbert and Utah legislators at Utah American Indian Caucus Day. SCR 2, which designates August 14, 2019 as “Navajo Nation Code Talkers Day” and was sponsored by Sen. Jani Iwamoto (D-Holladay), passed both houses of the legislature unanimously with the assembled Navajo leadership flanked by enlarged photos of the Navajo Code Talkers on the chambers’ floors.

The resolution recognized the numerous contributions of the Navajo Code Talkers, proclaiming that the Navajo Marines developed over 600 words for secret communication that were never broken – the only code in military history to have attained such a feat.

“[T]he Navajo Code Talkers leave a legacy of service that continues to inspire others to achieve excellence...[and] the Legislature and the Governor recognize the Navajo Code Talkers’ legacy and extraordinary contribution to the nation,” reads the resolution.

Navajo leadership emphasized the Nation's 2019 Utah state legislative priorities that were codified by the 24th Navajo Nation Council in NABIJA-02-19 on January 30th. Among the Nation's priority issues, leadership discussed education in the San Juan School District, maintenance and improvement of state routes on the reservation, the passage of the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement, and Navajo Nation-state collaboration on economic development.

Meeting with Utah State of Board of Education member Dr. Harold Foster, Navajo leadership focused on the unique needs of Navajo students in the San Juan County School District. Presently, the school district is implementing a program authorized and funded by HB 43 passed in 2017. The program is designed to help recruit teachers to rural San Juan County, retain them via bonuses and professional development, and increase the engagement of parents and guardians in their children's education. Joined by Council Delegates Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), Charlene Tso (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa), and Rickie Nez (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, T'iis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland), Speaker Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) emphasized the need to continue the program, which has elevated many schools' grading, and galvanize the Navajo Nation's leadership to advance the education of Navajo students in the county.

"We're here to make sure that if there's anything that you need in terms of support, the legislative branch can work with the president's office to make sure that we get the best possible resources to our students," Speaker Damon stated.

In a meeting with Governor Gary Herbert, Council Delegate Charlene Tso explained the need for continued infrastructure investment and development in southeastern Utah. Delegate Tso documented how the lack of power and water lines, poor road conditions, and un-remediated uranium and oil extraction sites are determinants in the success and wellbeing of her citizens. "We're robbing them of their health," Delegate Tso stated to Governor Herbert.

Council Delegate Herman Daniels (Shonto, Naa'tsis'áán, Oljato, Ts'áh Bii Kin) thanked the Governor for supporting the development of a roundabout at the intersection of US 163 and the entrance to Monument Valley Tribal park, Monument Valley Road, both of which serve as school bus routes for area students. Delegate Daniels asserted the safety concerns of his constituents regarding the hundreds of thousands of visitors who use US 163 to enter into the park annually. Two million dollars is allocated for the project by the Utah Department of Transportation and construction will commence later this year.

A two-year long negotiating process resulted in the signing of an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between the Navajo Nation and the Utah Department of Human Services Division of Child and Family Services with respect to the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

In 1978, the US Congress passed ICWA "to protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability of Indian tribes and families." The IGA states that "[e]very effort will be made to ensure that Navajo children will be raised within their families and the Navajo culture."

Additionally, the agreement states that DCFS and the Nation will support the "transfer of state court proceedings for foster care placement or the termination of parental rights of Navajo children not domiciled or residing within the Nation" to Navajo jurisdiction according to the provisions of 25 USC § 1911(b) and other stipulations outlined in the agreement.

During the signing ceremony with Governor Herbert, DCFS officials, and President Nez, Speaker Damon stressed the importance of ICWA in maintaining the integrity of Navajo families, highlighting his own experience benefiting from ICWA.

“I didn’t know my kinship, my people, but most importantly where my soul is. And that was back in the Navajo Nation.”

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