



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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State Task Force continue push for Navajo budget priorities at AZ State Capitol



PHOTO: State Task Force Chair Mark Freeland, Council Delegates Elmer Begay, Kee Allen Begay Jr., Nathaniel Brown, and Vince James met with Arizona State Senate President Karen Fann, Senate Appropriations Committee Chair David Gowan, and Vice Chair Vince Leach Mar. 10, 2020 on priority projects impacting AZ Legislative District 7. The task force was joined by former Hopi Chairman Ivan Sidney, Navajo County officials, and Kayenta and Dilcon Chapter leadership.

PHOENIX — As Arizona State leaders make progress on FY2021 Arizona State Budget negotiations, 24th Navajo Nation Council State Task Force Chairman Mark Freeland and Council Delegates Elmer Begay, Kee Allen Begay Jr., Nathaniel Brown, and Vince James continued ongoing advocacy on Monday of Navajo budget and policy priorities. “Our primary objective for back-to-back weekly visits to the Arizona State Capitol is to ensure Arizona State leaders and state Legislative District 7 representatives have a clear understanding of our Navajo budget and policy priorities that have a direct impact across the Navajo Nation,” said Chairman Mark Freeland.

Former Hopi Chairman Ivan Sidney, Navajo County Supervisor Jesse Thompson, Kayenta Township Manager Gabriel Yazzie, Kayenta Township Commissioners and Dilcon Chapter Manager Margie Barton joined Navajo Council leaders.

Meetings with state leaders included Arizona Senate President Karen Fann, Senate Appropriations Committee Chair David Gowan and Vice Chair Vince Leach, House of Representatives Speaker Rusty Bowers and Appropriations Committee Chair Regina Cobb, and State Representative Bob Thorpe.

Priority Projects for FY2021 Arizona State Budget

In each meeting, State Task Force members pressed leadership on the importance of the Hopi Route H60 project. H60 is a 13-mile stretch of dirt road that connects the Navajo community of Low Mountain and the Hopi community of Polacca. Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr., who represents the Low Mountain community, said the Navajo Nation, the Hopi Tribe and Navajo County have been collaborating and sharing expertise and resources because the project would be beneficial to both tribes. He emphasized the need for matching funds through state appropriations.

“Being able to work on this project brings back memories,” said Chairman Sidney. “It was President Reagan that helped bring the tribes back together for this project.” Chairman Sidney told Senate President Fann that the Hopi Tribal Council has a forthcoming resolution to push the partnerships forward. Chairman Sidney also acknowledged that Hopi Route H60 has brought Navajo and Hopi together, who both see this as a benefit for their tribal communities.

House of Representatives Speaker Rusty Bowers and Appropriations Committee Chair Regina Cobb committed their support in addressing Hopi Route H60 in the FY2021 Arizona State Budget. Speaker Bowers and Chair Cobb in turn asked the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe to work with other state leaders to convey the great importance of these investments.

The second priority State Task Force members outlined was the Ganado Senior Center and Veterans Center. The former Ganado Senior Citizens Center was located in a residential double-wide trailer and was closed in 2016 due to multiple safety issues and building deficiencies. “The need is there, and the Navajo Nation has plans to better serve our respected elders, in addition to opening up a Veterans benefits office within Ganado and the surrounding area. This facility and investment from the state is a great need for the Navajo Nation,” said Delegate James. The building would serve as a regional service center to ensure that all Navajo Veterans, surviving spouses of Navajo Veterans and Gold Star Parents can better access benefits and services from the Navajo Nation, state, federal and other agencies for which they qualify.

Another budget priority is the Kayenta Judicial Complex. “The community of Kayenta and the township has been working for over 17 years on this. It will cost a total of \$20 million and we’re asking for the state’s contribution of \$2.5 million,” said Delegate Brown. The Kayenta Township said the old Kayenta Police Department is slated to be demolished. The Kayenta Township Community Development Department has been working on five other modular buildings in and around the previous location of the criminal investigations program and peacemaking court. Lavonne Yazzie presented the plan to replace the current 54-foot by 56-foot modular building with a new judicial complex. She explained that public safety and judicial service needs continue to increase beyond what was originally planned.

“The office of probationary services is in a 30-year-old double wide trailer. We don’t have a prosecutor there, the nearest is in Tuba City,” said Yazzie. She went on to explain that land designations and project managers have been selected and approved and that the project will be shovel ready by July.

Lastly, Delegate Elmer Begay shared the construction ready status of the public safety and detention facilities for the Dilkon Justice Center. That project would further support the public safety response times in the southwest Navajo region ahead of the completion of the Dilkon Medical Center and community expansion.

AZ Senate President Fann & Appropriations Committee Leadership

Senator Gowan, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said the state creates ‘boxes’ for Arizona Legislature members that provide technical assistance in the formulation of the budget. He explained that boxes create unique opportunities for providing help to all



PHOTO: State Task Force Chair Mark Freeland gives an overview of the purpose of the group's visit in a meeting with Arizona State Senator Jamescita Peshlakai on Monday at the AZ State Capitol.

regions of the state. Senator Leach added that he gets questions from his constituents on how to get things done with the state. His response is to start with one project and build from there. He commended the Navajo leaders for bringing a large group to the state and presenting hefty supporting documents. "It shows you have skin in the game," he said. "That's really good."

President Fann added to the statements by Senator Gowan and Senator Leach. She said, "I'll tell you right now that you have my support on these." She explained that in last year's budget negotiations, politics got in the way of state appropriations that would have benefited the Navajo Nation. President Fann told the leadership group that, in the way Navajos and Hopis are working together, she needs the tribal leaders' help to bring Republicans and Democrats together to push these priorities in this year's appropriations.

"At the end of the day, it's really for the people. It's really for the children," said Delegate Brown. Chairman Sidney extended an invitation to state leaders to see the Hopi Route H60 region and to witness the need for the road project.

Chair Freeland shared that, in speaking with LD7 leaders, the inclusion of the group's priorities in the state budget could result in a bipartisan budget. "Really, as leadership, we're here to work with our LD7 leadership to bring these priorities to the surface," he said.

In a following meeting, State Representative Bob Thorpe explained that the Arizona House of Representatives needs 31 votes to pass a budget. In this year's budget process, he expressed his willingness to withhold his crucial vote in order to establish ongoing appropriations from the state's Transaction Privilege Tax revenues. The appropriations would be a percentage of TPT currently collected within tribal lands. "I will follow your lead," he said after offering the proposal to Navajo leaders.

AZ Legislative District 7 Senator Peshlakai, Reps. Teller and Tsosie

The State Task Force then met with all three LD7 state leaders, including Senator Jamescita Peshlakai, Representative Arlando Teller and Representative Myron Tsosie, to continue communicating Navajo budget priorities. "We're asking you for your support and your vote to help in getting onto the same page with the budget," said Chair Freeland.



PHOTO: Navajo Council Delegates, former Hopi Chairman Ivan Sidney and Navajo County Supervisor Jesse Thompson meet with Arizona House of Representatives Speaker Rusty Bowers and House Appropriations Committee Chair Regina Cobb at the Arizona State Capitol on Mar. 10, 2020.

State LD7 Representatives Arlando Teller and Myron Tsosie both acknowledged the priorities that the group is seeking to be included in the FY2021 Arizona State Budget. “You are my bosses and I am here to serve all my constituents for LD7,” stated Representative Teller.

Senator Peshlakai thanked the group for coming to the capital as part of Arizona State Legislative District 7. She added that LD7 is the largest state legislative district in the country.

Delegate Vince James asked Senator Peshlakai for her specific needs to ensure she votes for the budget. “The people want to see money being taken back to the Navajo Nation. If we do our job to get several projects on the budget, will you please vote for it,” asked Delegate James.

Delegate James explained that, due to the work of the Navajo and Hopi leadership over the past few weeks, there may be three or four projects coming up for vote. She acknowledged the projects and appealed to the group that the long-term vision remains the goal. “I will keep an open mind,” said Senator Peshlakai. “My support for these projects has been there.” All three Navajo state leaders representing LD7 are members of the Arizona Democratic Party.

“Tribal issues are nonpartisan,” said Chairman Freeland. Throughout the meetings with the Arizona State leadership, State Task Force members underscored the importance of focusing on the needs facing the people before any other political considerations.

The State Task Force plans to continue its advocacy and outreach on the FY2021 Arizona State Budget through its final passage and signing by the governor. The Arizona Legislature may vote on the budget as soon as next week.

The State Task Force is a subcommittee of the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council. The task force is charged with coordinating the Navajo Nation’s legislative priorities at the state levels in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado.

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