



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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State Task Force meets with key Arizona Legislators

PHOENIX – On Tuesday Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill), who serves as the chair of the Naabik'íyáti' Committee's State Task Force, and Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) met with several key Arizona state legislators to continue advocating for Navajo Nation issues as the State Legislature began its annual session this week.

In a meeting with Arizona Rep. Paul Boyer (Dist. 20 – R) who is the chair of the House Education Committee, Delegate Witherspoon asked for the legislature's support for more funding to fix and improve roads in rural Navajo communities, which often lead to long commutes for school bus drivers and students. In one local school, Delegate Witherspoon said buses travel an average of 1,900 miles combined each day and due to deteriorating roads, the school is faced with higher than average maintenance costs to maintain and fix their school buses.

The Council members also requested support for legislative action to create a fair distribution of the state's Transaction Privilege Tax revenue that is collected on the Navajo Nation. In previous years, it was estimated that the Navajo Nation contributes over \$25 million in TPT revenue annually, but only receives as little as over \$2 million in return for road improvements.

The annual TPT revenues also benefit Diné College and Navajo Technical University by providing funds each year for capital improvement projects on their respective campuses.

"We need a fairer distribution of the tax revenue to improve our roads, which will improve our economy and in return, it will lead to more TPT revenues for the Nation and the state overall," said Delegate Witherspoon, who repeatedly told state leadership that what is good for the Navajo Nation is good for the state of Arizona.

The State Task Force later met with Arizona Senate President Steve Yarbrough (Dist. 17 – R), and discussed several issues including the ongoing efforts to secure new ownership for the Navajo Generating Station in order to keep it operating beyond 2019 and to continue providing thousands of jobs and billions in revenues for the entire state of Arizona.

Delegate Witherspoon and Speaker Bates also urged each of the lawmakers to support the Nation's efforts to secure a fair and equitable water rights settlement with the state and to

support effort's to modernize gaming for tribes as a means to generating more income that would benefit many programs, particularly K-12 education which is expected to be a major issue during the current state legislative session.

The task force also met with several other legislators including chair of the Senate Commerce and Public Safety Committee Sen. Steve Smith (Dist. 11 – R), chair of the House Health Committee Rep. Heather Carter (Dist. 15 – R), Rep. Mark Finchem (Dist. 11 – R), and others.

Speaker Bates and State Task Force members will continue to meet with state leaders and will also meet with leadership from the states of Utah and New Mexico beginning in early February.

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