



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Council members address Utah issues with Utah Governor**



**Photo: Council Delegate Davis Filfred presented issues pertaining to Utah Navajo communities to Utah Gov. Gary Herbert and Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox in a roundtable discussion, which included other Utah tribal leaders on Aug. 9, 2016.**

**OREM, Utah** – Members from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Navajo Nation Council who represent Utah Navajo communities met with Utah Gov. Gary Herbert and Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Governor’s Native American Summit, to address several critical issues and to strengthen the government-to-government relationship between the Navajo Nation and state of Utah.

On Monday, Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Tecnospos, Tófikan, Red Mesa), Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), and Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez met with Lt. Gov. Cox and presented position statements

pertaining to issues such as the water rights, education and funding, sacred sites, and the Public Lands Initiative.

“In regards to the Utah water rights settlement, the Navajo Nation Council approved the agreement and we appreciate your support throughout the process. I would urge you and Gov. Herbert to reach out to Congressional leaders to introduce legislation to approve the water settlement, it is important that it is considered and passed by Congress as soon as possible,” said Delegate Filfred.

In January, Council approved the proposed water settlement agreement, which would quantify the water rights of the Navajo Nation in Utah through a negotiated settlement that requires Congressional approval.

Delegate Brown acknowledged the importance of strengthening the relationship between Navajo Nation and Utah state leadership, noting that education is a priority for both governments in bridging the achievement gap to provide high-quality instruction for Navajo students.

“I have faith in that both leadership will continue to sit together to plan and move forward for Utah Navajo issues. Education is priority for San Juan County and we will continue to work with Utah leadership to bring better quality of education for our Navajo children,” said Delegate Brown.

Delegate Brown also requested continued support for the Utah Navajo Health System to ensure quality health care for Navajos who reside in Utah, and commended the program for their service and commitment to Utah Navajo communities.

On Tuesday, Council members met with Gov. Herbert to continue discussion regarding Navajo issues in Utah.

Delegate Filfred provided Gov. Herbert with a position statement from the Navajo Nation, stating that for several years, Utah tribal leaders have called on his office to elevate the Utah Division of Indian Affairs office to a cabinet level position within the Governor’s Office to forge a stronger partnership between the state of Utah and tribal nations.

“I would urge the Governor’s Office to add the cabinet level position because it would illustrate a close working relationship with Utah tribes and would aid in pushing Native American issues forward, and would be in the best interest in promoting government-to-government relations,” said Delegate Filfred.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Gov. Herbert recognized the need to increase communication with not only the Navajo Nation, but all Utah tribal nations as well.

“Solutions for all these issues are not necessarily complex or simple, it’s probably a combination of all of the above. We need to find those solutions and figure out a way to solve the problems. I would suggest that the solutions could be found with the state, the federal government, and with

the tribes. You have a responsibility to solve your own problems, and as a state, we are here to help you help yourselves,” said Gov. Herbert.

The governor invited tribal leaders to contact his office directly, or Lt. Gov. Cox’s office, and directed the Utah Division of Indian Affairs to provide Council members and other tribal leaders direct contact information to his cabinet members and senior staff to aid with issues and receive updates on projects pertaining to each respective nation.

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