



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation Leaders host roundtable discussion on Hydrogen Energy Hubs with New Mexico

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Last week, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council hosted a roundtable discussion with state leaders from New Mexico regarding the future of clean hydrogen development on the Navajo Nation. Speaker Seth Damon was joined by Environment Department Secretary James Kenney, Indian Affairs Secretary Lynn Trujillo, Economic Development Secretary Alicia Keyes, and representatives for Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Discussion focused on garnering support for the Hydrogen Hub Development Act created through House Bill No. 228 being sponsored by State Representative Patricia Lundstrom (NM-District 9) being considered by the New Mexico Legislature this week. In November, President Joe Biden signed the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act allocating \$8 billion for the establishment of four national clean hydrogen hubs in the United States by 2026.

“As the governing body of the Navajo Nation, it is important we plan for a new energy future that can bring long term prosperity to our communities. We fully support the Hydrogen Hub Development Act that will serve as a catalyst for the development of an emerging hydrogen economy for the Four Corners region. In partnership with New Mexico, the Navajo Nation can be a clean hydrogen hub for Indian Country and lead the way for tribes. We support a future for solar, wind, helium, and hydrogen development that will create thousands of new jobs and boost our Navajo economy,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

Since 2019, Speaker Damon has been working with the Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company (NNOG) to seek new revenue generating projects and the development of Navajo hydrogen sources. In a letter to state lawmakers this week, the Navajo Nation Council requested a tribal seat as one of eleven members on the proposed Hydrogen Hub Development Board, which would oversee any proposed public-private partnership agreements for clean hydrogen in New Mexico.

“We appreciate three of New Mexico’s cabinet secretaries for joining us to discuss the economic potential of the Navajo Nation. We are in agreement with Governor Michelle Luajn Grisham to position New Mexico as a hub for clean hydrogen to create good-paying jobs while steering this emerging industry toward a lower-carbon future. We need to involve communities in this decision-making process and host public hearings to hear from the people. Everyone must be well informed on what hydrogen can do for our future,” said Chairman Rickie Nez (T’iistsoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tsé Daa K’aan, Newcomb, San Juan).

The 27,000 square miles of the Navajo Nation sits at the intersection of hydrogen development for New Mexico and Arizona, where both states share an interest in making the southwest region a clean energy hub.

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“A new center for an Arizona Carbon-Neutral Economy is being established at Arizona State University that will draft a competitive proposal to make our state the next regional clean hydrogen hub. We need to work with Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona to ensure we prepare the southwest region for renewable energy projects. The Navajo people are concerned about climate change, but that should not come at the expense of developing helium and hydrogen. Carbon emissions are an ongoing concern for all of us and work together on a smart energy plan that protects the future of our children,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain).

Coalition members for the new center include the Arizona Public Service, Salt River Project, Southwest Gas, Tucson Electric Power, Arizona State University, University of Arizona, and Northern Arizona University. These partners envision an Arizona economy that is carbon neutral by 2050.

Testifying before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ) expressed the economic potential of clean hydrogen. He added, “Arizona and New Mexico are looking into the \$8 billion allotted by the bipartisan law to create clean hydrogen hubs across the United States. If the Department of Energy designates the southwest as a hydrogen hub, it will help the country meet our climate goals. It will also provide badly needed jobs for the Navajo Nation, the largest Indigenous population in the country. Hundreds of Navajo workers have been displaced as coal plants have shut down. The Navajo Nation government is looking at hydrogen as a way to build their economy.”

Letters of support for the Hydrogen Hub Development Act were sent to New Mexico lawmakers from Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Speaker Seth Damon, and Resources and Development Committee Chairman Rickie Nez. Navajo leadership expressed support to designate the Four Corners region part of the new U.S. hydrogen economy.

“New Mexico’s prestigious science and technology ecosystem can lead the way in developing a carbon-free hydrogen economy that will stimulate investment, create jobs, and help the state grow into a clean energy powerhouse” said New Mexico Economic Development Secretary Alicia J. Keyes.

Earlier this month, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) hosted meetings in Washington D.C. engaging federal agencies that included a commitment by the U.S. Department of Energy to engage in tribal consultation with the Navajo Nation on future hydrogen hubs.

In January, the New Mexico Economic Development Department also released a study envisioning what a clean hydrogen hub looks like in New Mexico, that can be accessed here: <https://www.env.nm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Defining-and-Envisioning-a-Clean-Hydrogen-Hub-for-NM.pdf>

In a prepared statement, Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) added “As we make strides toward electrification and clean energy generation, it will still be difficult to decarbonize sectors like heavy trucking, aviation, and parts of the industrial sector. Clean hydrogen will be critical in solving these challenges. With science-based, rigorous standards in place, clean hydrogen production can become a quickly growing economic driver in New Mexico. By taking this step, New Mexico can become the nation’s leader in clean hydrogen production, research, and workforce development.”