



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation Council hosts meeting with the Office of Tribal Affairs at the White House

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PHOTO: Director of Tribal Affairs, PaaWee Rivera sits alongside Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. during a roundtable discussion with the Resources and Development Committee in Washington, D.C.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Last week, members of the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) of the 24th Navajo Nation Council hosted a roundtable conversation with PaaWee Rivera, Senior Advisor for Intergovernmental Affairs and Director of Tribal Affairs at the White House.

Discussion focused on the \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure law signed by President Joe Biden in November that allocates over \$13 billion in new tribal infrastructure projects, development of broadband initiatives for rural areas, and support for a congressional field hearing on the impact of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation.

“We thank Mr. Paawee Rivera for welcoming us on behalf of President Joe Biden and listening to our concerns from the Navajo people. The federal government has a trust obligation to protect the air, water, and sacred land that is Indian Country and ensure our natural resources are available for the next generation. By signing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Biden Administration sent a clear message to Sovereign Nations around the country that we are a top priority. The Navajo Nation looks forward to working with Mr. Rivera and the White House as we begin construction on broadband internet lines, roadways, bridges, and water pipelines,” said Chairman Rickie Nez (T’iistsoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tsé Daa K’aan, Newcomb, San Juan).

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The bipartisan infrastructure law is the largest investment in tribal nation infrastructure projects to include \$214 million to bring running water to 40 percent of Navajo families from the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement, \$2 billion for a tribal broadband connectivity program to expand broadband internet access, and \$11.2 billion in grants for abandoned coal mine land and water reclamation projects.

“Over 500 abandoned uranium mines have remained open across the Navajo Nation since the 1940s, poisoning the health of our families. The Biden Administration and Congress have an obligation to clean up these toxic sites now. It was Navajo uranium used for the Manhattan Project and during the Cold War, so do not forget that history. We request a congressional field hearing on uranium and appreciate Mr. Rivera for taking time to hear our concerns as the key Native American advisor to President Biden. The Navajo people deserve an answer and immediate assistance from the United States government now,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain).

Last year, Delegate Begay sponsored Resolution No. CO-60-21 that requests for a United States congressional hearing to be conducted within the Navajo Nation on the long term effects of uranium on the health of the Navajo people. The resolution was unanimously passed by a vote of 22 in favor, 0 opposed.

“The Navajo Nation Council continues to engage our federal partners about the priorities of our 110 chapters. The construction of our broadband internet lines, roads, bridges, and water pipelines will create hundreds of new jobs for the Navajo people. We appreciate Mr. Rivera for his advocacy on behalf of all tribes in the United States. As a fellow New Mexican, he has a deep understanding of the complex issues impacting Indian Country,” added Council Delegate Mark Freeland (Becenti, Lake Valley, Náhodishgish, Standing Rock, Whiterock, Huerfano, Nageezi, Crownpoint).

Mr. Paawee Rivera shared his support for ongoing tribal consultation between the Biden Administration and Navajo Nation. He added that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act invests more than \$13 billion directly in tribal communities and has made billions more eligible for tribes to apply for this year.

In January, the White House released a guidebook to help unlock the benefits from these historic investments for the 570+ Sovereign Nations in the United States that can be accessed at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/build/>

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