



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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The Navajo Nation Council and Utah Lieutenant Governor Deidre Henderson discuss infrastructure and COVID-19 recovery priorities

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PHOTO: Speaker Seth Damon and Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. welcome Utah Lt. Governor Deidre Henderson to the the capital of the Navajo Nation.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Today, the 24th Navajo Nation Council hosted a roundtable meeting with Utah Lieutenant Governor Deidre Henderson to discuss the Navajo-Utah Water Rights Settlement, investments from the bipartisan infrastructure law providing over \$1 billion to Utah, and the recovery of Navajo communities from the pandemic.

Speaker Seth Damon officially welcomed Lt. Governor Henderson, Special Counsel on Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk, and Utah Division of Indian Affairs Director Dustin Jansen to the Navajo Nation and provided a tour of the historic Council Chambers.

“The Navajo people appreciate the leadership of Lt. Governor Henderson and Utah state leaders for working to maintain a close government-to-government relationship during this pandemic. Our local economy thrives when we support our Navajo small businesses and tribal enterprises, including the immediate construction of our Utah infrastructure projects. We must work together on the Navajo-Utah Water Rights Settlement to bring clean drinking water to 40 percent of our families in southern Utah,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

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The Utah Legislature capped water system projects at \$3.5 million per project in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. Preliminary estimates from recent studies show that it would cost around \$5 million to bring running water to the Westwater Subdivision from Blanding, Utah. Working with Delegate Charlaine Tso, the Navajo Nation Council shared its commitment to close the gap for the project after a final cost estimate by April.

“Governor Spencer Cox and Lt. Governor Henderson have been outspoken advocates for southern Utah and our Navajo families residing there. Today, we applaud their commitment to getting potable water and electricity to Navajo homes at the Westwater subdivision. Another transportation initiative of high priority is the construction of a roadway from Montezuma Creek to Aneth and Navajo Mountain. Our partnership with Utah includes a request for funding to build this road. We look forward to hosting another site visit with Utah state leaders, so they see the potential of these projects,” said Council Delegate Charlaine Tso (Mexican Water, Tółıkan, Teec Nos Pos, Aneth, Red Mesa).

Last November, President Joe Biden signed the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that includes \$214 million for the Navajo-Utah Water Rights Settlement, \$3 billion in highway funding, and \$1.7 billion for the construction and improvement of Indian Health Services facilities in Utah.

“The bipartisan infrastructure law and ARPA funding allow the Navajo Nation and Utah to modernize roads and bridges, expand broadband access, and improve water delivery to the rural areas of the state. Yet many of our Navajo families still haul water, burn firewood, maintain their septic systems, and wash clothes at the local laundromat. The Navajo Nation Council appreciates Governor Cox and Utah state lawmakers for already investing over \$4.5 million for the Westwater project. My chapters now need the support of Utah lawmakers to pave the road from Oljato Chapter to Navajo Mountain so our families and communities are better connected” added Council Delegate Herman Daniels Jr. (Ts’ah Bii’ Kin, Navajo Mountain, Shonto, Oljato).

The Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement now confirms the Navajo Nation’s right to deplete 81,500 acre-feet of water per year from Utah’s Colorado River Basin apportionment and authorizes around \$220 million for water infrastructure projects. The state has already invested \$8 million to the Navajo Utah Settlement Trust Fund.

Joining Speaker Damon and Vice Chairman Raymond Smith Jr. (Klagetoh, Wide Ruins, Houck, Lupton, Nahat’á Dził) in the Council Chambers, Lieutenant Governor Deidre Henderson shared her admiration for the Navajo people. She added, “First, understand that we must do everything possible for families across southern Utah. We both have been committed to getting water lines constructed to the Westwater subdivision and that is our top priority. Electric lines are fully funded and soon families will have electricity in their homes because construction has already begun. Governor Spencer Cox and I look forward to completing all aspects of the Navajo-Utah Water Rights Settlement as fresh, clean drinking water is provided to Navajo chapters. We appreciate Delegate Tso, Delegate Daniels, and the 24th Navajo Nation Council for your leadership during this pandemic. The Navajo people are resilient and we get through this time together.”

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