



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 27, 2023

Speaker Curley testifies before Congress in support of clean water access for the Navajo Nation



PHOTO: Speaker Curley told the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs that Navajo Leadership stands ready to work with the Committee, with Congress, and with the Administration to address the Navajo Nation's access to clean drinking water.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Wednesday, Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley advocated for the Navajo Nation's clean water access, presenting the Nation's case before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. She supported the bills S. 2385 and H.R. 4746, titled "Tribal Access to Clean Water", in a hearing themed "Water as a Trust Resource: Examining Access in Native Communities."

"Our Navajo people often say that 'water is life' and we fully understand the sacredness of this precious resource. Unfortunately, approximately 30-percent of Navajo Nation homes lack running water. The lack of access to water includes more than a domestic water supply, which impedes economic development on the Navajo Nation. Water is needed to support farming, industrial development, and municipal development," said Speaker Curley.

She thanked the Committee for their support to fully fund the Indian Health Service (IHS) Sanitation Deficiency Program through the Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act in 2021, and noted that the Navajo Nation continues to wait for the full implementation of the funding through the IHS.

She pointed out the absence of federal programs to enhance water access for economic growth. "There are no federal programs to address water access for economic development and therefore the settlement of our water rights cases has served as the vehicle for obtaining sufficient federal funding and authorization as necessary to design and construct clean drinking water projects that will promote economic development by serving businesses, government buildings, and other municipal needs."

Speaker Curley also noted that one of the most important ways that Congress can support the Navajo Nation is by helping to enact legislation to approve and implement water rights settlements that have been negotiated with states, the federal government, and other stakeholders. Through these settlements, the Navajo Nation can secure more reliable water supplies by quantifying our reserved water rights and obtaining support for infrastructure projects needed to put those water rights to use to benefit the Navajo people.

In July, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren also testified in support the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project Amendments Act of 2023, S. 1898. Enacting this, Speaker Curley highlighted, would bolster water supplies for various regions, including parts of the Navajo Nation, Jicarilla Apache Nation, and the City of Gallup, N.M.

She also mentioned ongoing efforts to introduce settlement legislation for New Mexico's Rio San Jose and Zuni Basins and initiatives to draft a water rights settlement for Arizona.

In her closing remarks, Speaker Curley reinforced the Navajo Nation commitment to work with the Committee, Congress, and the Administration. "Navajo Nation Leadership stands ready to work with this Committee, with Congress, and with the Administration to address the biggest issue facing the Navajo Nation, access to clean drinking water. Such leadership working together can secure a future where the Navajo people have access to clean reliable water needed to thrive."

The hearing also included testimonies from U.S. Asst. Secretary of Indian Affairs Bryan Newland and IHS Deputy Director Benjamin Smith. The full hearing can be accessed online at <https://www.indian.senate.gov/hearing/oversight-hearing-water-trust-resource-examining-access-native-communities>.

###