



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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25th Navajo Nation Council advocates to Utah State legislators for Navajo Mountain road funds and traditional medicine Medicaid reimbursement



PHOTO: Council Delegate Curtis Yanito (center) and Law and Order Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (right) advocated for Navajo priorities including the Navajo Mountain Road Project with Utah Sen. David Hinkins (left) and Rep. Phil Lyman.

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah – On Tuesday, Council Delegates Curtis Yanito and Eugenia Charles-Newton advocated to Utah State legislators for \$2.9 million in funding to complete an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for the Navajo Mountain road project and for Indian Health Service (IHS) reimbursements for qualified traditional medicine services to Medicaid beneficiaries who reside in Utah.

Executive Appropriations Chair, Senator Jerry W. Stevenson, stated that the state of Utah is facing reductions in this year's budget, which limits funding appropriations.

"Navajo and Utah State legislators have been working on the Navajo Mountain Road project for over 15 years, and each year, construction costs increase," said Council Delegate Charles-Newton, who chairs the Law and Order Committee. "The lack of a paved highway connecting Blanding to Navajo Mountain adversely impacts public safety and emergency response times in addition to areas of education, economic development, and tax revenues."

Before construction can take place, the project requires an Environmental Impact Study which will cost \$4 million. The Navajo Nation has committed \$1 million and the Navajo Utah Commission approved an allocation of \$100,000 from the Navajo Revitalization Fund.

Council Delegate Yanito and Chair Charles-Newton met with Utah Sen. David P. Hinkins (R-Dist. 26), who agreed to submit a request for appropriation for \$2 million to fund the Navajo Mountain Road Project EIS.

"People in Monument Valley face a three-hour drive as opposed to a twenty-minute drive if this road was built," Sen. Hinkins said.

Sen. Jerry W. Stevenson pledged his support for Sen. Hinkins' bill.

"Our Native American tribes are an amazing piece of Utah," Sen. Stevenson said. "I'll work on this."

The delegates voiced the need for Utah legislators to implement a proposal for a traditional health service benefit for Medicaid reimbursement. The proposal will allow IHS and tribal facilities to receive reimbursement for qualified Traditional Medicine services provided for their Medicaid beneficiaries in Utah.

The proposal would require an amendment to Utah Medicaid's State Plan and would require minimal costs in a fiscal note.

"As Native Americans, we survive on traditional healings, and these traditional services aren't covered by Utah healthcare facilities," Council Delegate Yanito said. "We have veterans who are affected by PTSD who utilize traditional medicine to address their trauma. Making these services reimbursable will greatly impact the health of our nation."

In 2016, Arizona implemented a similar Medicaid waiver to reimburse traditional healing services, which has been successful in addressing the healthcare needs of the state's Native American population.

Utah state legislators were open to discussion about the proposed Navajo priorities, and many expressed interest in visiting the Navajo-Utah chapters and the areas of the proposed Navajo Mountain Road Project.

The Utah State Legislative Session started on Tuesday, January 16, and ends on Friday, March 1.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council thanks the Utah State Representatives and Senators who met with the council delegation and listened to the priority needs they presented.

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