



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 26, 2024

New Mexico Caucus meets to establish Navajo priorities in New Mexico



N.M. Caucus Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty noted that one goal of the caucus is to optimize capital outlay projects in New Mexico.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Wednesday, the New Mexico Council Delegates Caucus heard reports from the Division of Aging and Long Term Care Support (DALTCS) and the Department of Diné Education to assess the status of senior center projects and guide the process of establishing Navajo educational priorities.

According to N.M. Caucus Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty, one goal of the caucus is to optimize capital outlay projects in New Mexico.

“Within our next two meetings, the caucus will establish priorities in collaboration with New Mexico Chapters and the Construction Projects Management Department (CPMD) to present to the New Mexico Legislators,” Chair Crotty said.

Delegate Lester Yazzie asked for clarification on funding sources as they pertain to the New Mexico Match Fund. “If we receive capital outlay, are we allowed to request for New Mexico Match Funds to finish out the projects?” Yazzie asked.

Patti Williams, 25th Navajo Nation Council New Mexico Lobbyist, clarified that New Mexico

Match Funds are provided to the state to match federal funding, maximizing the opportunity for project completion.

"It's a source of money made available to the state if there are federal dollars that can be leveraged to complete projects," Williams said.

Council Delegate George Tolth asked DALTCS Program and Project Specialist Anslem Lewis about the status of the Casamero Lake Senior Center.

"The community has been inquiring about this for a long time," Tolth said. "We need a strong plan to report back to the community."

Lewis responded that the Casamero Lake Senior Center, along with six other capital projects, need scope of works (SOW) to be provided by CPMD. Lewis said the SOWs would be sent to the state of New Mexico by week's end.

"The Casamero Lake Senior Center has completed the Intergovernmental Agreement design and construction but needs to execute a SOW for the contract," Lewis said. "The project needs approximately \$760,000 to bring the center into compliance."

Lewis noted that DALTCS funds are provided through the state's general obligation bonds and that the public votes to fund these projects.

"We need to encourage everyone to vote on Nov. 5 in favor of supporting these general obligation bond projects," said Chair Crotty.

Regarding educational priorities, Dr. Shayla Yellowhair, Superintendent from the Department of Diné Education, presented an overview of DODE's recommendations pertaining to the New Mexico Indian Trust Fund.

Dr. Yellowhair said that DODE recommends that tribal leaders keep the Indian Trust Fund and Long-Term Educational Need separate from each other to ensure that the Indian Trust Fund doesn't get convoluted with other state education bills.

"DODE recommends the usage of a proportional and not equitable funding formula to be utilized in the establishment of the Indian Trust Fund funding formula by the state of New Mexico for all 23 tribes," Yellowhair said.

Yellowhair said that HB134 argued for equitable distribution but not proportional to a tribe's student population and land base size. "We recommend that all tribal leaders of the Indian Trust Fund carefully review HB134 and assess all provisions for direct applicability to the establishment of the Fund."

Council Delegate Tolth said that policy recommendations regarding the Indian Trust Fund need to go through the oversight of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee.

"We're talking about a government-to-government relationship and we need to act on behalf of the tribe, not only from DODE. It happened last year when DODE made a statement on the Indian Trust Fund on behalf of the Nation, when they shouldn't have," Tolth said. "Regarding education, the oversight needs to be aware of any recommendations made at the state level."

In 2024, the New Mexico Caucus presented the state of New Mexico with 11 priorities that were established through NABID-60-23. The caucus plans to review and refine the list to four priorities that consider priorities of the Executive Branch and the New Mexico chapters.

The New Mexico Council Delegates Caucus plans to finalize Fiscal Year 2024 priorities by Oct. 16, 2024.

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