



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council Delegates meet with New Mexico state legislators and department heads during 57th New Mexico Legislature



Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council met with New Mexico Representatives Michelle Paulene Abeyta and Joseph Franklin Hernandez to discuss priorities including Capital Outlay projects.

SANTA FE, N.M. – On Thursday, members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council met with New Mexico state legislators and department heads to advocate for Navajo priorities and address issues affecting Navajo communities during the 57th New Mexico State Legislature.

Council Delegates Amber Kanazbah Crotty, George H. Tolth, Eugenia Charles-Newton, Nathan Notah, Lester Yazzie, and Speaker Crystalyne Curley met with New Mexico Representatives Martha Garcia, Michelle Paulene Abeyta, and Joseph Franklin Hernandez to discuss barriers affecting New Mexico Chapter Capital Outlay projects and the use of state-appropriated funds.

Representative Garcia stated that certain Capital Outlay funding already appropriated for New Mexico Chapter projects is at risk of reversion unless reauthorized by the state. She emphasized the need for coordination to ensure funds remain tied to approved projects.

Rep. Garcia discussed establishing a regional office, modeled after a council of governments, to assist chapters with Capital Outlay requirements and project advancement.

Rep. Abeyta raised concerns about reversions caused by stalled project progress. She stressed the need to improve communication and maintain consistent engagement between state and tribal leadership. She noted that several New Mexico counties are willing to partner with Navajo chapters by serving as fiscal agents for Capital Outlay projects, allowing project costs to move forward and be reimbursed by the state.

With approximately \$29 million in Navajo Nation Capital Outlay funding at risk of expiration, Delegate Crotty emphasized the need for strengthened coordination between the state and tribe to keep chapters informed about project obstacles, reauthorizations, and potential reversions.

"These dilemmas present an opportunity for the New Mexico Caucus to work directly with the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department to bring about solutions and not reversions," Crotty said.

Speaker Curley agreed that strengthened consultation between the Nation and the state could decrease the likelihood of funding being reverted.

Delegate Notah addressed how the lack of established rights-of-way has created liability challenges for infrastructure projects and county partnerships responsible for maintaining Navajo roadways. Delegate Charles-Newton added that jurisdictional conflicts have resulted in lost funding for major projects and furthered advocacy for the reauthorization of Navajo Capital Outlay projects.

"Shiprock bridge funding was a mess," said Delegate Charles-Newton. "We lost funding over jurisdictional issues, and in the end, the funding was taken back."

Representative Hernandez made a recommendation to maintain certain tribal funding appropriations within state departments that could provide proper fiscal oversight.

Delegate Dr. Andy Nez met with New Mexico Cabinet Secretary for the Department of Transportation Ricky Serna to advocate for road projects within his delegate region, including Navajo Route 321 and improvements to New Mexico Route 134 over Narbona Pass.

Dr. Nez requested additional funding to support the survey and design phase for paving Navajo Route 321, a 7.7-mile road in Crystal, N.M., located in McKinley and San Juan counties. He noted that the road lacks proper compaction and becomes heavily muddied after precipitation.

Dr. Nez also advocated for installing traffic and weather cameras along NM Route 134 over Narbona Pass to improve road condition reporting and traveler safety.

Secretary Serna stated that the FY2026 Transportation Project Fund has received additional funding that will support additional projects and that chapters may also apply for support through the Local Government Road Fund.

Delegates also met with New Mexico Majority Floor Leader Reena Szczepanski to discuss equitable education funding and consultation on the Yazzie-Martinez corrective action plan.

Delegate Crotty called for direct consultation between the New Mexico Public Education Department and the Navajo Nation before the Nation considers supporting legislation related to the corrective action plan. She reiterated the need for education funding models that reflect conditions on the Navajo Nation, including large landmass, rural geography, and infrastructure challenges.

Delegates later met with New Mexico Speaker of the House Javier Martinez to reinforce the Nation's education and public safety priorities. Delegate Crotty emphasized the importance of maximizing Capital Outlay and other funding opportunities for Head Start facilities, noting that early childhood infrastructure is critical to long-term educational success.

Delegate Tolth raised concerns about the lack of proper commissioning and certification of peace officers operating on Navajo lands and called for improved certification processes to strengthen accountability and respect for tribal sovereignty.

Council Delegates Helena Nez Begay, Rickie Nez, Nathan Notah, Eugenia Charles-Newton, Brenda Jesus, Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Lester Yazzie, George H. Tolth, Dr. Andy Nez, and Speaker Crystalyne Curley attended the American Indian Day presentation at the New Mexico State Capitol Rotunda on Friday, Feb. 6. The New Mexico House of Representatives marked American Indian Day by recognizing tribal leaders and honoring representatives from tribal communities.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council extends appreciation to New Mexico legislators, including Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, for meeting with Navajo leadership and hearing the priorities of Navajo constituents.

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