



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Judiciary Committee members visit Washington officials, advocate for Navajo Supreme Court building

***Currently, Navajo Supreme Court hearings are conducted in an inadequate
rented facility with only 432-square-feet of space***

WASHINGTON — Kee Allen Begay Jr., chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council, and member Harold Wauneka visited Washington officials on behalf of the Navajo Nation to advocate the need for a proposed \$11 million Navajo Supreme Court building recently.

Begay (Many Farms/Round Rock) said a Navajo Supreme Court building is greatly needed.

"There are numerous funding and policy issues that we advocated for on behalf of the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch and the Navajo Nation," Begay said. "We have always been advocating for funding to build a respectable Navajo Nation Supreme Court building."

The Navajo Nation Council contributed \$1.5 million for preliminary costs associated with the construction of the court building planned for a 5.982 acre parcel in Window Rock, Ariz. – the capital of the Navajo Nation tribal government. The appropriation will help fund the building's cost for architectural, engineering, environmental assessments and its archeological clearances.

According to Begay, the initiative is supported by legislation of the Intergovernmental Relations Committee of the Navajo Nation Council, with added support from the Navajo Nation Bar Association, the Arizona Bar and the Utah Bar Association.

Currently, the Navajo Supreme Court conducts hearings at a rented facility that provides inadequate space of only 432-square-feet.

Begay said members of the Judiciary Committee scheduled two days of meetings, along with a strategy session with lobbyist Tripp Funderburk, former U.S. Congressmen Bob Livingston (R-LA) and Dennis Hertel (D-MI) from the Livingston Group. Lobbying efforts concentrated on securing jail funding in the Stimulus Package and increasing funding in the FY 2010 Interior Appropriations bill and Commerce Justice State Appropriations bill for tribal jails, tribal courts and public safety issues in Indian country.

Judiciary Committee members also met with congressional staff members from the offices of U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ), Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ), Congressman Ben R. Luján (D-NM) and Congressman Edward Pastor (D-AZ).

"In past years, we have asked our Senators and Representatives for appropriation earmarks, which were not included in final appropriations bills due to questions about the statutory authorization for tribal court construction," Begay said. "Now, we are working with the Congressional delegations from Arizona, New Mexico and Utah to introduce and enact legislation that authorizes funding for tribal courts. This will greatly increase the probability for securing appropriations for the Navajo Nation Supreme Court building.

Judiciary Committee Chairman Begay and Public Safety Committee Chairman Rex Lee Jim (Rock Point) wrote detailed appropriation request letters to the Senators and Representatives representing the Navajo Nation expressing appreciation for the \$225 million for tribal jails and other Indian public safety priorities that were included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The letters also requested support for:

- \$400 million for the first year of the five-year, \$2 billion Emergency Fund for Indian Safety and Health, which was enacted during the previous session of Congress.
- \$50 million for tribal jails in the FY 2010 Commerce Justice State Appropriations bill.
- \$280 million for tribal law enforcement in the FY 2010 Interior Appropriations bill. Currently, the Navajo Nation struggles with a ratio of 1.06 police officers for 1,000 people, compared to the national average of 2.5 police officers per 1,000 people. The Interior Appropriations bill, if approved, will provide at least a 10 percent increase for tribal law enforcement.
- \$25 million appropriation for tribal courts in the FY 2010 Interior Appropriations bill. Currently, the BIA tribal courts program has not increased funding for several years and as a result, Navajo Nation courts closed 130,380 cases from 2004 to 2006 and 56,460 unclosed cases in the same years.

Rex Lee Jim said funding for Indian Country is obviously greatly needed.

"We hope Congress will build on funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 in FY 2010," Jim said. "This would help address the long unmet needs that have built up over many years of insufficient funding for tribal public safety and for other insufficiencies effecting Indian Country."

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