



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Secretary of Indian Affairs Ken Salazar, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Larry EchoHawk visit the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan and members of the Intergovernmental Relations Committee welcomed U.S. Interior Secretary Kenneth Salazar and Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Larry EchoHawk to Window Rock today, Aug. 20, as the two toured the southwest portion of the United States visiting various tribes.

Secretary Salazar was also accompanied by Hilary Tompkins (Navajo), the Interior Department Solicitor, as they addressed the Intergovernmental Relations Committee (IGR) on topics concerning the Navajo Nation's priorities with law enforcement, education and economic development.

Salazar thanked Speaker Morgan for the invitation to address members of the Navajo Council.

"Thank you very much Mr. Speaker," Salazar said. "I appreciate the opportunity to come and spend time here in Window Rock, the capital of the Navajo Nation."

"President Barack Obama has said to me from day one that we are moving forward and opening a new chapter in the relationship we have between the United States and the Nation's first Americans," he added. "It was in that recognition that we decided to make sure that certain functions of the U.S. government relating to Indian Country was represented by the very best and the very brightest people we could find."

Salazar referred to Hilary Tompkins as his pick to lead his department as the Solicitor.

"I am proud today to bring with me Hilary Tompkins—one of your own," Salazar said. "When I was looking to find the Solicitor of the Department of the Interior—I looked far and wide and found Tompkins."

Tompkins is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation from the remote community of Ramah on the New Mexico portion of the vast Navajo Nation. She received her bachelor's degree from Dartmouth College in 1990 and later her juris doctorate from Stanford University in 1996. From 2003 to 2008, she worked for the Navajo Nation Supreme Court in Window Rock as a law clerk.

Getting to business, Secretary Salazar outlined three important guidelines that guide him as the Secretary of the Interior.



U.S. Interior Secretary Kenneth Salazar addresses the Navajo Nation Council as Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Larry EchoHawk looks on during their visit on Aug. 20, 2009, in Window Rock, Ariz. (Photo by Joshua Lavar Butler)

First, he talked about the need to respect Native American communities of the Nation, the need to build and strengthen government-to-government relationships.

Second, as the Obama agenda unfolds, he acknowledged that he has a chance to work together with the Navajo Nation and other tribes to make progress on the agenda which includes the education of young people, to create partnerships in law enforcement and to improve and spur economic development.

Third, he addressed the concerns of the Navajo Gallup Water Supply Project. He explained, "I worked very hard to pass a lands bill that included important provisions in the settlement of Indian water rights. It is my hope that we can work to find the necessary appropriations to fund the \$800 million project that will provide 70,000 people with clean water."

The Navajo Council members had an opportunity to ask Secretary Salazar questions.

Sampson Begay, chairman of the Navajo Nation's Transportation and Community Development Committee, asked questions regarding road funding.

Begay explained the Navajo Nation has 5,000 miles of road and 3,000 miles of that road is paved. The only funding source is from the Indian Reservation Roads Program and most recently, funding has become problematic as other entities have begun to draw funding resources from this fund.

Raymond Joe, vice-chairman of the Navajo Nation's Public Safety Committee, informed the delegation of the shortage of detention facilities on the Navajo Nation and the credibility of the Navajo Nation's law enforcement officers.

"We are lacking detention facilities on the Navajo Nation," Joe said. "The facilities we have are old and small, because of this, our Navajo law enforcement officers can't do their jobs and our criminal justice systems cannot function correctly when we have no facilities."

Katherine Benally, vice-chairwoman of the Navajo Nation's Economic Development Committee, conveyed her concerns regarding business site leasing contracts.

"A year ago, the Navajo Nation took over the responsibility and authority to sign business site leases," Benally explained. "We are ready and up to the challenge, however the federal government did not give us the funding for the program, so we kindly ask you to support the movement of funding to the Navajo Nation."

Secretary Salazar and his staff took notes of concerns from the Navajo Nation tribal legislators. A position paper will be formulated and sent to Salazar from the Council.

The IGR accepted Salazar's report to their committee by a vote of 11-0.

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