



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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Speaker Morgan leads Navajo delegation to TBAC

*Morgan hopeful that President-elect Obama,
new Congress will hear concerns of Indian Country*

WASHINGTON — In preparation for the U.S. Presidential transition and the development of the federal FY 2010 Budget, Navajo Nation tribal representatives attended the quarterly meeting of the Tribal Budget Advisory Council on Dec. 8-10 in Washington.

Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan led a Navajo delegation that included Arbin Mitchell, director for the Navajo Division of Community Development, and Omar Bradley and Sharon Pinto with the BIA Navajo Region.

On a quarterly basis, representatives from all 12 geographic regions of American Indians and Alaskan Natives of the United States meet with representatives from the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to discuss concerns existing in Indian Country.

Tribal leaders are provided the opportunity to create and work on suggestions and to set priorities for the federal budgeting process, despite dramatic decreases to vital programs and services in Indian Country. Tribes have become even more assertive in their pursuits to secure its fair share of federal dollars.

The two-day meeting began Dec. 8 with a tribal caucus of TBAC members, and then continued Dec. 9-10 with updates provided by staff from the DOI and the BIA about their departments.

Most of the discussions during the two-day session were a continuation of the last TBAC meeting held Aug. 12-13. At that time, TBAC members staunchly supported and recommended that broad Indian participation in the transition team be made, that participation in national policy initiatives be provided, and that the new administration provide long-term actions and sustained efforts.

In addition, TBAC members suggested that new presidential appointees be educated on major tribal priorities and that they support Indian tribes in all facets of their government-to-government relationships.

TBAC members also discussed the possibility of meeting with President-elect Barack Obama, his White House Staff, the Secretary of Indian Affairs and all other departments dealing with Indian tribes in an effort to make sure that Indian tribes have a seat at the table.

"I am hopeful that President-elect Obama and the new Congress will hear concerns of Indian Country," Speaker Morgan said. "This was not always the case, previous administrations did not consider Indian tribes as a priority and there was not a lot of attention focused on Indian Affairs. In the past, appointments took more than a year and they did not match the needs for Indian Country. This time around, it's different, President-elect Obama has a transition team in place and they want to hear from Indian Country — that is very significant for us all."

Many of the TBAC members noted the cooperation and enthusiasm from Washington, particularly the Obama transition team — a night and day comparison from previous administrations. The Obama transition team has

requested reports, suggestions and priorities from Indian Country and TBAC members are hopeful that positive changes will be made.

Speaker Morgan said, "The cycle of inaction may be decreased, as TBAC members have identified priorities for Indian Country, and they plan to send management and policy recommendations to the new administration."

Another paramount concern is the selection of political appointments to the new administration, particularly to the departments that deal with Indian Affairs.

"We need an administration that will recognize our needs in Indian Country and it is important that a director of Indian Affairs be appointed, someone that makes Indian Country a priority," Speaker Morgan added. "We need someone who has Indian heritage; we also need a deputy secretary from Indian Country as well. Change will not come about, until we have leadership that understands our unique issues."

In other discussions, priorities for the upcoming FY 2010 budget were set. The priorities included issues related to water resources, public safety, management of natural resources, education, economic development and the continued advancements of self-determination of Indian Country.

Mary Jane Miller, director of Budget Management for Indian Affairs, presented a bleak update on FY 2009 and explained, "There continues to be a continuing resolution, P.L. 110-329, through March 6, 2009."

The continuing resolution will continue, while Congress says that there should be no new starts of programs and there is currently no funding for fixed costs or for pay raises — issues that hinder continued operations of services in Indian Country.

In previous sessions, frustrations over the budgeting process and decreased federal funding to tribes has been major topics of discussion. A majority of TBAC members expressed, once again, their frustrations about the upcoming fiscal year budgets and they are hopeful that President-elect Obama and a new Congress will hear their pleas for increased funding to vitally needed programs.

"Despite the budget shortfalls, Indian Country must continue pushing their agenda forward and advocate their needs," Speaker Morgan said. "Our advocacy needs to become stronger and we need to be even more assertive in our approach in educating the Presidential transition team about the needs of all 562 tribes in the United States, regardless of the challenges that lie ahead — we must not slow down, we must not lesson our advocacy."

The next quarterly meeting for the TBAC will be March 16-18 in Arlington, Va.

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The TBAC, created in 1999, was established to help facilitate tribal government participation in the federal budgeting process. The organization is comprised of two tribal representatives from each of the 12 BIA regions from throughout the United States. The BIA Navajo Region's two representatives are Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan and Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr.

The mission of TBAC is to provide an advisory government-to-government forum and process for tribes and the federal departments to develop budget requests. The group works within the confines of tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, self-governance and self determination. The group is also designed as an advisory council and was established to reach out to Indian Country for their involvement in the federal budgeting process.