



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

Contact: Joshua Lavar Butler, Communications Director

Phone: (928) 871-6384

Cell: (928) 255-2946

Fax: (928) 871-7255

joshualavarbutler@navajo.org

joshualavarbutler@yahoo.com

www.navajonationcouncil.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Council delegates attend American Indian Day at New Mexico State Legislature

"We are here for a common purpose and it is my hope that we can strengthen our working relationship to ultimately help improve the quality of life of Navajo citizens in New Mexico."

- Lawrence T. Morgan, speaker of the 21st Navajo Nation Council

SANTA FE, N.M. — Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan and several New Mexico Council delegates attended American Indian Day at the New Mexico State Legislature to support legislation to benefit Navajo constituents and to oppose state budget cuts which would directly impact Navajo communities.

"We are here for a common purpose and it is my hope that we can strengthen our working relationship to ultimately help improve the quality of life of Navajo citizens in New Mexico," Speaker Morgan said when addressing state legislators.



Lawrence T. Morgan, speaker of the 21st Navajo Nation Council, addresses the New Mexico State Legislature on Feb. 6, 2009, in Santa Fe, N.M. (Photo by Curtis Ray Benally)

New Mexico Council delegates in attendance included: Hoskie Kee (Littlewater/Baca-Prewitt/Casamero

Lake); LoRenzo C. Bates (Upper Fruitland); Herman R. Morris (Naschitti/Tohatchi), Young Jeff Tom (Mariano Lake/Smith Lake), Lawrence R. Platero (Tohajiilee), and Phillip Harrison Jr. (Red Valley/Cove). Morgan worked with other New Mexico Council delegates to ensure issues needing to be addressed would be covered.

Morgan emphasized a government-to-government working relationship built on cooperation and collaboration. He also spoke against the proposed retraction of capital improvement funds to help alleviate the state deficit.

"I ask that those funds remain in place," said Morgan while addressing the state legislature. Morgan also asked legislators to include state tribal citizens in the stimulus package being proposed and to remain cognizant of the limited state services tribal states citizens currently receive.

Speaker Morgan also asked lawmakers to continue to support legislation which respects the government-to-government relationship, and legislation which helps to protect Navajo language and culture. More specifically, he asked legislators to support the "State-Tribal Collaboration Act," which was endorsed by the interim Indian Affairs Committee. He said the Act would provide a stronger framework to solidify government-to-government communications and collaborations between state and tribal governments.

New Mexico Council delegates also supported the Act, and in a special meeting with New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, asked that the Act not exclude leadership at the chapter house level when the language is drafted.

"We support this Act and when it does go through, we want to make sure it does not exclude our leaders at the chapter level," said Young Jeff Tom. Other Council delegates also expressed concern about projects in their respective communities when speaking with Gov. Richardson.

Morgan also asked legislators to fully fund chapter house projects, rather than partially fund them.

"Granting complete and total funding of chapter house projects is absolutely necessary," Morgan said. "It is pertinent chapters receive full funding so their projects will not stall."

Speaker Morgan expressed his gratitude to the state of New Mexico, and more specifically the Indian Affairs Department for making Indian issues a top priority. The American Indian Day was the 22nd consecutive one, where leaders from the state's 22 tribes were in attendance.

"Secretary Warren and his staff are doing a great job in their respective positions and my office looks forward to working closely with them again this year," said Speaker Morgan.

In 1953, the New Mexico State Legislature created the Commission on Indian Affairs, and six years ago, Gov. Richardson elevated the New Mexico Office of Indian Affairs to the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department.



Navajo Council delegates Lawrence R. Platero, LoRenzo C. Bates; Herman Morris, Young Jeff Tom, Hoskie Kee and Phillip Harrison Jr. stand up to be recognized during American Indian Day at the New Mexico State Legislature on Feb. 6, 2009, in Santa Fe, N.M. (Photo by Curtis Ray Benally)

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