



## The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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### **Agreement will ultimately speed up administrative review process for capital improvement projects in New Mexico**

*Intergovernmental agreement receives unanimous votes from TCDC and IGR*

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — With a unanimous vote of 9-0, the Intergovernmental Relations Committee of the 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council approved an Intergovernmental Agreement between the Navajo Nation and the state of New Mexico Indian Affairs Department that will ultimately speed up the administrative review process for capital improvement projects for Navajo chapters in New Mexico.

The Intergovernmental Agreement has been in discussion for more than two years. The Intergovernmental Agreement, which is also being referred to as the "Master Agreement," was approved by the Transportation and Community Development Committee (TCDC) on Sept. 16 and was approved by the Intergovernmental Relations Committee (IGR) on Sept. 23.

"This Master Agreement is the fruition of hard work between both the Navajo Nation and the state of New Mexico Indian Affairs Department over the past several years," said Johnny Naize (Nazlini/Tselani/Cottonwood), vice-chairman of the TCDC, who sponsored the legislation.

The Master Agreement was proposed after the Nation and State recognized the tedious administrative review process involved in getting capital outlay projects underway at Navajo chapters. The Navajo Nation's Grant Agreement paperwork process took anywhere from three months, and in some cases, even a year to approve and the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department had to go through three state agencies to get a required Joint Powers Agreement.

Each year, the New Mexico Legislature appropriates funds for capital outlay projects for New Mexico chapters on the Navajo Nation. These projects range from chapter house improvements, multipurpose buildings, senior citizen centers, power line extensions, house wiring, water line extensions, airport/road infrastructure and other services. In 2004, the Navajo Nation received more than \$5.8 million, with funds nearly doubling to \$13.7 million in 2005. The amount steadily increased to \$14.1 million in 2006, but in 2007, the amount decreased to \$11.9 million, and then to \$4 million in 2008. It was the lengthy administrative review process which eventually led to the expiration of projects and to capital outlay funds being reverted back to the State.

The Master Agreement is anticipated to shorten the administrative review process to one month, and in turn, significantly decrease, if not eliminate, funding being reverted back to the State.

When Navajo chapters turn in their Grant Agreements, it would have to go through the Nation's administrative 2 N.N.C. 164 (A) process. The Grant Agreement would have to be approved administratively, then by the TCDC and IGR Committees, and would finally require a signature by the President. The Master Agreement streamlines that process and now when chapters turn in their Grant Agreement, it will only require 2 N.N.C. 164 (B) review. Essentially, this means the Grant Agreements that chapters turn in will now act as a subcontract to the Master Agreement.

The State also made adjustments to their administrative process. The Indian Affairs Department converted from Joint Power Agreements to Grant Agreements, and therefore, are no longer required to go through three state agencies to get paperwork approved.

"This Master Agreement is a monumental legislation; a real demonstration of the work between the Navajo Nation and the state of New Mexico Indian Affairs Department," said Alvin H. Warren, cabinet secretary.

The Navajo Nation and New Mexico State Indian Affairs Department put together a number of meetings and "think tanks" to approach the challenges. Some of the efforts to improve capital outlay efforts were establishing work groups to meet more routinely to reconcile information about projects, specifically addressing reasons for reversions, and discussing ways to improve the process. The State also increased their visits to the Navajo Nation and increase training and technical assistance to staff at the chapter house level.

The TCDC and the IGR Committee agreed across the board that the Master Agreement will help the Nation to be more responsive to constituents. Members of the TCDC include Sampson Begay (Jeddito/Steamboat/Low Mountain), Johnny Naize (Nazlini/Tselani/Cottonwood), Lorenzo Bedonie (Hardrock/Pinon), David Rico (Pueblo Pintado/Torreon/Whitehorse Lake), Omer Begay Jr. (Cornfields/Greasewood Springs/Klagetoh/Wide Ruins), Jerry Bodie (Sanostee), Leslie Dele (Tonalea) and Willie Begay (Chilchinbeto/Kayenta).

Members of the Intergovernmental Relations Committee include Ervin M. Keeswood Sr. (Tse Daa Kaan), Leonard Teller (Lukachukai/Tsaile/Wheatfields), Charles Damon (Baahaali/Church Rock), Orlanda Smith-Hodge (Cornfields/Greasewood Springs/Klagetoh/Wide Ruins), Roy Laughter (Chilchinbeto/Kayenta), Danny Simpson (Huerfano), Amos F. Johnson (Forest Lake/Rough Rock/Black Mesa) and Lee Jack Sr. (Indian Wells/Whitecone).

"I applaud the TCDC and IGR Committees, as well as the various Navajo Nation divisions and departments for working with the state of New Mexico to get this Master Agreement finalized," Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan said. "Your hard work is going to benefit the Navajo people."

Morgan said special recognition needs to be given to Cabinet Secretary Alvin H. Warren.

"Ever since he was appointed to the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department in January by Gov. Bill Richardson, he has made great efforts to work closely with the Navajo Nation," Morgan said. "He is innovative and an asset to the State and to the Navajo people."

Both Navajo and state leaders continue to encourage chapters to become certified under the Local Governance Act (LGA) since it enables individual chapters to contract directly with the state, exercise self-governance, enhance financial efficiency, facilitate quicker project approval and completion, and utilize their own approved policies and procedures. There are currently five chapters on the New Mexico side of the Navajo Nation which are certified, including: Newcomb, San Juan, Tse Daa Kaan, Sheep Springs and Little Water.

An official signing of the Master Agreement between the Navajo Nation and state of New Mexico is pending.

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