



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Speaker Morgan welcomes Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Larry EchoHawk to the Navajo Nation

Second visit continues discussion of identifying problems, issues

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Larry EchoHawk, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, concluded his second day of a three-day tour across the Navajo Nation by visiting with Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan, members of the Navajo Nation Council's Intergovernmental Relations Committee and the Education Committee today.

EchoHawk's visit comes only a few weeks after his visit here to the Navajo Nation with Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior Ken Salazar and Hilary Tompkins, Solicitor of the Department of the Interior.

The visit, by invitation of Speaker Morgan, gave EchoHawk and his staff the opportunity to visit several schools in and around the Navajo Nation, and the opportunity to see some of the needs here on Navajo first hand.

Earlier in the day, EchoHawk visited students at Rough Rock Boarding School, where he delivered greetings on behalf of Secretary Salazar and U.S. President Barack Obama. His visit to the school was prompted by the recent awarding of \$54 million to the school this year to build a new desperately needed facility.

EchoHawk thanked Speaker Morgan for the invitation.

"Thank you for your hospitality and we look forward to listening to your concerns," Echo Hawk said. "It is great to be back once again to spend three days here on the Navajo Nation."

One important issue was education, Andy R. Ayze, chairman of the Education Committee, along with Dr. Calvin White, director of the Office of Diné Science, Math and Technology, were on hand to give a presentation about the Navajo Nation's position on its educational Accountability Work Book.

In the presentation, White explained the Work Book is the first step in designating the Department of Diné Education as a State Educational Agency. The Work Book includes an application for a technical assistance grant to create an alternative definition of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). By definition, AYP is a statewide accountability system mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which requires each state ensure all schools and school districts make adequate yearly progress.

White explained, "The current definition of AYP is not uniquely crafted to meet the cultural and educational needs of Navajo schools and Navajo students. The purpose of the Work Book is to establish an alternative accountability



Larry EchoHawk, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, visited the Navajo Nation to meet with Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan and members of the Navajo Nation Council. Left to right: Chief of Staff Paul Tsosie; Larry EchoHawk; his wife Terry EchoHawk and Darren Pete, Congressional Liaison for Indian Affairs. (Photo by Christian Bigwater)

system by waiving the current definitions and outlining a new system developed by the Navajo Nation.”

In accomplishing this, the Navajo School System will be entitled to create its own standards and accreditation system, its own certification system, its own accountability system, its own curriculum and its own procedures and policies for the governance of education.

Earlier this year, the Education Committee passed a resolution on March 30 supported by the IGR Committee promoting this idea. The resolution recommends the approval of the Navajo Nation’s consolidated state application accountability work book for state grants under Title IX, part C, section 9302 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and the U.S. Congress. The resolution also authorizes the Education Committee and the Department of Diné Education the ability to advocate with the federal government and the U.S. Congress in support of this resolution.

After hearing the presentation, EchoHawk was concerned, he referred to a previous visit to a Montana tribe where the Reading First Program had positive effects on the academic performances of tribal students. The program focuses on putting proven methods of reading instruction in classrooms, a program created by the Bush Administration as an essential piece of the 2002 No Child Left Behind law.

“Reading First is the best educational program I have every seen,” said EchoHawk.

In further discussion, White cited studies performed in Navajo Nation schools that are contrary to national and state-wide studies that support the Reading First Program.

“Most Navajo Nation schools are not making AYP, so that’s why we are presenting this information to you,” White explained. “We need your support when we submit this Work Book to the Bureau of Indian Education.”

Navajo Council Delegate Katherine Benally voiced her frustration with the BIE’s control over the educational system on the Navajo Nation as well, particularly with school construction.

“Our case is not unique, we have been trying to get our school on track for years,” Benally said. “Our documents will show you the frustrations with the BIE. We are still Bureau-operated and we want to see if we can go ‘638’ to complete our school construction on our own. This should be an option for us. Instead, our students are left far, far behind and we have a whole lot of catching up to do—we need your support.”

In other issues, Sampson Begay, chairman of the Transportation and Community Development Committee, expressed his displeasure with how funds are disseminated by the federal Indian Roads Program.

“The program is beginning to turn into a state and county roads program—it was established to provide funding to assist BIA and tribal roads we have here on the Navajo Nation,” Begay explained to EchoHawk. “Our only source of funding comes from that program. When we see funds taken from that, it becomes a problem for us. Currently, we are putting together a position paper to address this issue and will submit it to Washington D.C.—we have more than 17,000 miles of road here on the Navajo Nation.”

In other issues, Elmer P. Begay (Dilcon/Teesto), a member of the Public Safety Committee, informed EchoHawk about the challenges the Navajo Nation faces each day in protecting its people.

“We are faced with a serious lack of manpower to address crime—we have an emergency situation here,” Begay said. “We have proposals in Washington and we ask that your office and your staff help in moving these things forward—we would greatly appreciate it.”

EchoHawk and his staff made notes of the concerns and will plan to visit the Navajo Nation again in the future to report the progress of these issues as they work cooperatively with staff from the Office of the Speaker and the Navajo Nation Council.