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MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin | 928.221.9253
Krista Thompson | 928.637.5603
Jolene Holgate | 928.871.7160
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Speaker Naize and Delegate Bates push for the approval of the Navajo Nation's Gaming Compact with the New Mexico Indian Affairs Committee



Photo: Speaker Johnny Naize, President Ben Shelly, and Council Delegate Lorenzo Bates discuss the proposed gaming compact between the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico with the New Mexico Indian Affairs Committee on Wednesday.

CHURCH ROCK, N.M. – On Wednesday afternoon, Speaker Johnny Naize (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) and chair of the Naabik'iyáti Committee's Gaming Task Force Subcommittee Council Delegate LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland), met with the New Mexico Indian Affairs Committee to advocate for the state's approval of the proposed gaming compact between the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico.

Currently, the Nation is one of five tribes signed onto the 2001 Gaming Compact which is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2015. The Nation entered into the Compact in 2003.

In his address to the Indian Affairs Committee, Speaker Naize stressed the economic importance of the compact for the Navajo Nation, and urged the approval of the compact.

"The Navajo Nation needs this compact approved in order for the Nation to continue developing its economy," said Speaker Naize. "These terms are consistent and fulfill the intent of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, while promoting economic development and creating self-sufficiency and allowing for a stronger tribal government."

In May 2012, the Navajo Nation began initial discussions with Gov. Susana Martinez's Lead Negotiator and after nine months of tough negotiating, an agreement was reached on the terms of the Compact.

On Mar. 8, Gov. Martinez submitted the Navajo Nation Compact to the Committee on Compacts which later recommended the approval of the Compact and submission of a joint resolution to the New Mexico Legislature for a vote.

Although the New Mexico Compact Negotiation Act requires the legislature to act without delay, the gaming compact was not placed on the Senate floor for a vote during the 2013 State Legislature's regular session.

"We have patiently followed the process outlined in the Compact Negotiations Act," said Delegate Bates to Indian Affairs Committee members. "There has been a question over whether or not the compact should go back to the Committee on Compacts. However, it is the Navajo Nation's position that this does not go back to the Committee on Compacts and should be moved to the House and the Senate floor at the 2014 [State Legislature session].

Speaker Naize and Delegate Bates also emphasized that the proposed Compact is an agreement between the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico and does not bind any other tribe.

Also in attendance were representatives from the four other tribes currently operating under the 2001 Gaming Compact, which include the Pueblo of Acoma, Jicarilla Apache Nation, Mescalero Apache Tribe, and the Pueblo of Pojoaque.

During the discussion, representatives from the Jicarilla Apache Nation and the Mescalero Apache Tribe expressed support for the Navajo Nation's proposed gaming compact.

"I am pleased that other New Mexico gaming tribes are supportive of Navajo's proposed gaming compact which has not always been the case," said Speaker Naize following the meeting. "It is the first time the other tribes have publicly stated their support and it strengthens our Nation's gaming endeavors."

The New Mexico State Legislature is scheduled to convene for its regular session on Jan. 21, 2014.

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