



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council members speak in support of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act



PHOTO: Speaker LoRenzo Bates speaking in support of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act on Capitol Hill on July 6, 2016.

WASHINGTON D.C. – Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) and Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) spoke in support of the introduction of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act by U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D – N.M.), which seeks to prohibit the exporting and sale of Native American sacred and cultural items.

The Congressional bill would enhance the protections of Native American cultural items under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act by increasing the sentencing penalty

from five years to 10 years for violating NAGPRA and prohibiting the exporting of Native American cultural items obtained in violation of NAGPRA.

On Wednesday, Speaker Bates spoke in support of the bill on Capitol Hill along with Pueblo of Acoma Governor Kurt Riley, National Congress of American Indians Policy Director Denise Desiderio and Senator Heinrich.

“I want to extend my sincere appreciation to Senator Heinrich for introducing this bill, not only on behalf of the Navajo Nation Council but on behalf of Indian Country. I can’t emphasize enough that if it has happened to the Navajo Nation, then I’m certain it has happened all across Indian Country,” stated Speaker Bates.

On Tuesday, Delegate Hale joined New Mexico tribal leaders in Albuquerque N.M. and Senator Heinrich, where he also expressed his appreciation for the bill. Delegate Hale sponsored legislation that was unanimously approved by the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee on June 23, urging Congress to support the Congressional bill.

Delegate Hale previously stated that efforts to protect sacred items have escalated since December 2014, when the Navajo Nation sent a delegation to retrieve seven sacred Navajo masks that were taken from the boundaries of the Navajo Nation to be auctioned in Paris, France.

The Naabik’iyáti’ Committee’s Sacred Sites Subcommittee has worked with the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, Navajo Nation Washington Office, and the U.S. Embassy in France, to address the transfer and sales of sacred items abroad. The Congressional bill is also supported by a resolution passed by the NNHRC.

Senator Heinrich on Wednesday said the bill would increase penalties for stealing and illegally trafficking of cultural patrimony and prohibit the exportation of such items.

“We can also recognize a clear difference between supporting tribal artists or collecting artifacts ethically and legally as opposed to dealing or exporting items that tribes have identified as essential and sacred pieces of their cultural heritage. We need to take all possible action to stop the latter and help repatriate stolen culturally significant items to their rightful owners,” added Senator Heinrich.

The bill is co-sponsored by U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D – N.M.). To view the bill, please visit: <http://www.heinrich.senate.gov/download/stopacttext>.

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