



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Utah Tribal Leaders address the protection of Native American children

WENDOVER, Utah – On Monday, Utah tribal leaders gathered in the community of Wendover, Utah to discuss issues that would affect tribes at the state and national level, such as the Indian Child Welfare Act and voting issues that includes inefficient polling sites and a lack of language interpreters to aid non-English speaking Navajo people in San Juan County, Utah.

Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) attended the meeting on behalf of the Navajo Nation and conveyed support for a proposed resolution by the Utah tribal leaders body to send a position statement to Utah Gov. Gary Herbert regarding the state's lack of consultation efforts with Utah tribes concerning the placement of Native American children in non-Native American foster homes.

"We have endured a lot of things. I remember hearing from our old folks that they were taken from their homes, so I know the hardship they have felt. It is important for a native child to stay with their people because they need to be exposed to their language and culture," said Delegate Filfred.

Delegate Filfred offered a motion to support the resolution and to act on the position statement as an act of solidarity between all the Utah tribes. UTL members voted unanimously to support the resolution.

According to UTL chair, Virgil Johnson who serves as the chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute reservation, the resolution would be signed by all members of the UTL and sent to Gov. Herbert's office and the state's judicial court system.

"We are calling on the state of Utah to have a meaningful consultation with [Utah] Indian tribes when Indian children are removed from their homes. This will be presented to the governor and the court system to establish the tribes' stance on ICWA cases," said chairman Johnson. "We are no longer standing back and letting the states and the federal government dictate to us what they want."

Johnson said it was important that members of the UTL continue to reinforce tribal sovereignty and self-determination to ensure that the federal government is held to their trust responsibility to the Utah tribes and address their concerns regarding ongoing ICWA cases.

Delegate Filfred also provided a report to the UTL regarding issues facing Utah Navajo, such as voting ballot concerns in the San Juan County that occurred during the recent general election.

“We have current issues with San Juan County, Utah regarding the voting ballot and redistricting issues, as well as the language on the ballots. The state of Utah also denied Navajo people the right to vote by not reopening polling stations. Some polls were opened, but there were no interpreters and they ran out of ballots,” said Delegate Filfred.

He added that there were many Navajo voters who do not speak, read, or write fluently in the English language and interpreters were not provided to adequately assist Navajo citizens. Delegate Filfred said some of the language on the ballots was too complex for some Navajo voters to comprehend in the English language.

Delegate Filfred also reported that a proposed two-story health care facility would be constructed in the community of Montezuma Creek. He added that the Nation is currently seeking additional external funding to begin construction of the facility.

At the conclusion of the UTL meeting, members provided reports from their respective tribal nations, and discussed a recommendation to pass an additional resolution to support the right of Native American inmates to receive access to adequate health care and spiritual services, which would be considered at the next UTL meeting.

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