



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council members participate in Utah Legislature's Native American Legislative Liaison Committee meeting

MEXICAN WATER, Utah – Last Thursday, Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) and Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. (Shonto, Naa'tsis'áán, Oljato, Ts'áh Bii Kin), participated in the Utah Legislature's Native American Legislative Liaison Committee meeting held at the Mexican Water Chapter.

Delegate Filfred said the meeting marks the first time that Utah's NALLC has conducted business on the Navajo Nation, in which several issues were discussed pertaining to education, providing broadband infrastructure to rural Navajo communities, and a proposed Native American Graves Repatriation Act that would be sponsored by Utah State Rep. Michael E. Noel (R – UT).

The Utah Education and Telehealth Network presented to the NALLC regarding a proposed initiative to offer fiber broadband services to schools and health care facilities in the Utah San Juan County area, which will include the communities of Whitehorse, Montezuma Creek, Bluff, Mexican Hat, Monument Valley High School, Tse'bii'nidzisgai, and Naa'tsis'áán.

"In terms of the fiber optic and broadband services, I do support the initiative. It is much needed for our education and health systems. We have the Utah Navajo Health System out here, and for many years we have been trying to get a veterans outpatient service, but they said we needed broadband for their network systems," said Delegate Filfred.

Delegate Filfred added that he would propose the initiative to the Navajo Nation Council's Resources and Development Committee to garner support for the project, aid with obtaining right-of-ways on Navajo land, and begin the process to acquire supplemental funding to help move the project forward and work with the UETN to implement the services.

Delegate Daniels said a few Utah chapters have already passed resolutions to support the project and stressed the importance of working with chapter officials and grazing permit holders.

"Broadband is needed on the Navajo Nation at the Utah schools. It will be a challenge to get the line from Oljato to Naa'tsis'áán because you have to go through two canyons. The Nation needs to work with the grazing permit holders to get the lines through Navajo land, it needs to be a joint effort between our leaders and communities," said Delegate Daniels.

State Rep. Noel brought up the issue of private land owners who have found Native American remains on their land, adding that he reached out for recommendations from Navajo leaders regarding protocols that should be followed to relocate the remains and ensure that it is done correctly with respect to Utah tribes. He added that he would like to propose legislation to make the process state law.

Delegate Filfred said generally the Navajo people do not disturb human remains, however, it was recommended that the Navajo Nation and other tribes be consulted when graves are found. Ideally, it would be best to leave the graves undisturbed if at all possible, added Delegate Filfred.

“I sit on the Sacred Sites Subcommittee and have strong ties with our Human Rights Commission. Being from that perspective, we do not want remains to be in an open area or put on display—we take it as an insult. We bury our relatives and we do not go back or desecrate their resting place. We recommend that the remains are taken back to their respective tribe, but ensure the tribe is involved in the entire process,” said Delegate Filfred.

Delegate Filfred also provided a written position statement to the NALLC regarding issues that the Navajo Nation continues to advocate for, including traffic control and fire/emergency services in the Oljato community, which is the gateway to the Monument Valley Navajo Nation Tribal Park. With the high volume of visitors to the tribal park each year, adequate services need to be implemented to ensure safety and traffic control in the area, said Delegate Filfred.

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