



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation leadership holds roundtable discussion with the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs



PHOTO: Speaker LoRenzo Bates addresses members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs during a roundtable discussion in St. Michaels, Arizona on Sept. 16, 2016.

ST. MICHAELS, Ariz. – Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland), President Russell Begaye, and Vice President Jonathan Nez on Friday took part in a roundtable discussion entitled, “Safeguarding Tribal Sovereignty, Economic Development, and Education on the Navajo Nation,” with members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, including chairman U.S. Senator John Barrasso (R-WY) and U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ). The discussion was held at the Karigan Professional Building in St. Michaels, Ariz.

Other members of Council in attendance included Council Delegates Dwight Witherspoon, Edmund Yazzie, Tom Chee, Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Lee Jack, Sr., Otto Tso, Raymond Smith, Jr., and Benjamin L. Bennett.

During the opening remarks, Speaker Bates highlighted recent accomplishments of the Council including the approval of approximately \$180 million for water infrastructure and development projects and an additional \$150 million for economic development, agricultural, and water projects in each of the five Navajo agencies.

Speaker Bates also acknowledged the recent efforts of Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) and the Law and Order Committee to increase salaries for Navajo police officers, which the LOC had identified as a top priority since taking office.

“These are examples of ways that my colleagues are thinking outside of the box to develop solutions to help our communities using the resources we currently have,” said Speaker Bates.

He also requested the support of the senators to reinstate a line item in the federal budget for the Former Bennett Freeze Area, while highlighting the progress of the Inter-Agency Task Force and the delegates that represent the nine impacted chapters, in developing a comprehensive plan for the recovery efforts in the area.

Other issues discussed included the development of a proposed water rights settlement for the Lower Colorado River and funding to complete the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project for Navajo Agricultural Products Industry.

Sen. McCain expressed his support for seeking an LCR settlement and asked Navajo Nation leaders to make it a priority. He also noted that Sen. Barrasso and U.S. Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) are ready to move a settlement forward once terms are reached.

“We can let it go through the courts and wait, or we can sit down and try to secure a settlement. I ask that you give it some priority,” said Sen. McCain.

Following the roundtable discussion, several members of Council said they were disappointed that President Begaye did not afford them an opportunity to address the senators during the meeting to speak on behalf of their respective communities and constituents.

Speaker Bates said there are many issues that Council members need to address at the federal level and President Begaye did not allow the senators adequate time to inform Navajo leadership of their positions on important matters that impact the Navajo Nation.

“The Navajo Nation Council was looking forward to face-to-face dialogue, but unfortunately President Begaye did not afford that opportunity,” said Speaker Bates, who added that he and the Council look forward to meeting with Congressional leadership to advocate for the Nation in the coming weeks.

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