



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo leaders advocate for education funding, human trafficking laws, ICWA, and water rights with Utah Governor and Legislators



PHOTO: (left to right) Red Mesa Chapter president Herman Farley, Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown, Steven Begay, Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Utah Lt. Gov. Spencer J. Cox, Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, Council Delegate Davis Filfred, Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon, and Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. at the Utah Office of the Governor in Salt Lake City, UT on Feb. 5, 2018.

SALT LAKE CITY, UT – The 23rd Navajo Nation Council’s State Task Force attended the 2018 Utah Legislature Tribal Caucus on Monday, and met with Utah Gov. Gary R. Herbert, Lt. Gov. Spencer J. Cox, and several of the state’s top legislators to continue advocating for the priorities of the Navajo Nation for the current Utah state legislative session.

State Task Force chair Dwight Witherspoon and vice chair Steven Begay were joined by Council Delegates Nathaniel Brown, Davis Filfred, Herman Daniels, Jr., and Speaker LoRenzo Bates at the Utah State Capitol where they advocated for increased funding for schools in San Juan County, Utah, which serves a large population of Navajo students. In recent years, the Utah Department

of Education has repeatedly given failing grades to schools within the district in regards to education performance. Of over 1,400 students in the district it is estimated that over 1,200 are Native American – most of which are Navajo students.

Delegate Filfred, who represents several Utah chapters, delivered a position statement on behalf of the Navajo Utah Commission to Lt. Gov. Cox and requested that their administration secure more funds to the San Juan County school district for the purposes of recruitment and retention of teachers, increased salaries for teachers, professional development for faculty and staff, transportation assistance for students and teachers, and other measures that would ultimately help to close the achievement gap for Navajo students. In recent years, the school district has requested as much as \$1 million, but has only received \$250,000.

In regards to the proposed Utah Navajo Water Settlement Act, Lt. Gov. conveyed his support for the bill and stated that he provided supporting testimony to congressional members recently. He added that getting the proposed settlement through congress by the end of the current calendar year is a priority for the Governor's Office.

Speaker Bates told Gov. Herbert and Lt. Gov. Cox that the Navajo Nation must be at the table when the state discusses issues that affect Navajo people including, any position that the state may take on the Indian Child Welfare Act, education bills, and the proposed water settlement bill.

In a meeting with Utah Attorney General Sean D. Reyes, Delegate Brown thanked his office for working with him to begin addressing human trafficking of Navajo people within the state of Utah. He informed Attorney General Reyes that the Council is developing a "White Paper" to determine how the Nation will proceed with working with states to implement new laws or amend current laws to prevent human trafficking by helping victims and punishing perpetrators.

Council members also reaffirmed the Nation's support for the Indian Child Welfare Act and offered support and advocacy for the state's effort to uphold the Act, despite a recent challenge filed in federal court by the state of Texas in which the state and other plaintiffs are challenging the Act and regulations that were implemented in 2016 that support tribes. Since then, a few other states have also joined in challenging ICWA. Delegate Brown adamantly stated his support for ICWA and asked Attorney General Reyes to support it as well.

Delegate Daniels requested that the state of Utah prioritize funding to provide fencing along State Route 163 and 164 near Montezuma Creek and Monument Valley to prevent livestock from entering the highways – an issue that has resulted in many vehicle accidents and deaths.

Delegate Filfred recently introduced Legislation No. 0045-18, which seeks to officially adopt the priorities of the Navajo Nation for the current Utah legislative session. The bill is expected to be considered by the Naabik'íyáti' Committee on Thursday.

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