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Navajo Indian Irrigation Project Negotiation Subcommittee meets with House and Senate members

TEMPE, Ariz. – During a policy roundtable discussion held at Arizona State University's Tempe campus on Friday, Navajo Indian Irrigation Project Negotiation Subcommittee members Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill), Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), and Navajo Agricultural Products Industry delegated CEO Lionel Haskie, presented to the Western Caucus Foundation to advocate for funding to benefit the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project.

The Western Caucus Foundation is composed of U.S. House and Senate members from the democratic and republican parties that represent western and rural state who are committed to protecting private property, strengthening local control, promoting economic growth, and increasing energy independence.



PHOTO: Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett at the Western Caucus Foundation policy roundtable discussion in Tempe, Ariz. on March 9, 2018.

“The subcommittee and NAPI will continue to advocate for the completion of NIIP, which the federal government is obligated to complete as well as to continue to address NIIP’s issues and concerns to the Western Caucus Foundation,” stated Delegate Bennett during the discussion.

In 1962, congress passed Public Law 87-483, which established the NIIP for the purpose of furnishing irrigation water to approximately 110,630 acres of farmland on the Navajo Nation, which remains incomplete.

The presentation by Haskie concentrated on approximately 9,800 irrigated acres of the NIIP, also known as Block 9, which would require \$24 million annually for six years in order to complete. The

NIIP's priorities also include a request for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to fund annual operations and maintenance costs, and funding for the replacement of deteriorating infrastructure.

Delegate Begay said the lack of increased funding from the federal government limits the progress and initiatives that the NAPI board and management envision for the growth of the Navajo-owned enterprise that employs hundreds of Navajo people.

"Navajo leadership and NAPI need to advocate at every level for the project until the federal government upholds the treaty obligations. The federal government needs to hear our issues and concerns," said Delegate Begay.

U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ), who chaired the policy roundtable, thanked the subcommittee and NAPI for the presentation, adding that tribal nations including Navajo Nation should continue to work with the Western Caucus Foundation to address their concerns and issues.

In April 2017, the Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'íyáti' Committee created the NIIP subcommittee composed of Council Delegates Steven Begay, Benjamin L. Bennett, Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Leonard Tsosie, and Speaker LoRenzo Bates for the purpose of negotiating an MOA with the federal government regarding the funding and completion of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project, to advocate for Operations and Maintenance funding, and other available funds.

Friday's roundtable discussion on "Arizona and Western Policy" was part of a series of meetings that the Western Caucus Foundation hosts periodically to hear directly from to hear issues directly from elected leaders and tribal leaders in the western United States.

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