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VICE PRESIDENT NEZ CALLS FOR FURTHER PARTNERSHIP WITH STATE OF UTAH IN AREAS OF WATER RIGHTS, STATE LAND REVERSIONS AND EDUCATION

SALT LAKE CITY-Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez spoke before the American Indian Caucus Day at the Utah State Capitol addressing areas regarding natural resources, land management, education and wellness.

Vice President Nez addressed the Navajo-Utah Water Rights Settlement which was recently approved by the 23rd Navajo Nation Council. He noted that the Navajo people have raised many concerns about the bill and that the Office of the President and Vice President (OPVP) would support greater allocations for multiple purposes.

OPVP has previously expressed support for the Navajo-Utah Water Rights Settlement, in general, as it provides adequate water resources for Navajo communities in Utah. However, OPVP would like to see all Navajo communities have access to this valuable resource, not only for drinking purposes but also to benefit schools, start-up businesses and other programs.

"This is not the final version of the settlement," he said. "President and I will come to the table to meet with congressional leadership to establish allocation. We do appreciate the support of Council."

OPVP would like to see commitment at a congressional level for the legislation to be finalized.

In discussing public lands management, Vice President Nez addressed the idea of reversion of federal lands back to state governments along with the Utah Public Lands Initiative. Many tribal leaders face questions from their membership regarding why they cannot go out and forage medicinal herbs and food or get firewood on lands they traditionally used, he said.

"As indigenous people, we advocate that if there are lands that are being reverted back to anyone, they should go to Indian tribes first. Tribes should be at the table whenever these lands are discussed. We can determine the co-management of these lands if need be. As such we support the Bear's Ears Initiative."

Vice President Nez spoke in support of Utah House Bill 33 - American Indian/Alaskan Native Education Amendment. Among other things,



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Vice President Nez thanked Utah Governor Gary Herbert for being in attendance at the American Indian Caucus Day. He said it showed the leader was listening to Indian Country.

this bill provides for the position of an American Indian-Alaskan Native Public Education Liaison, it creates the American Indian-Alaskan Native Education Commission, and provides for the adoption of a state plan to



During the American Indian Caucus Day at the Utah State Capitol, Vice President Nez addressed areas regarding natural resources, land management, education and wellness.

address the education achievement gap of the state's American Indian-Alaskan Native students.

"Many of our leaders will attest to that the fact that in our tribal communities, our students are way below academic achievement standards. This is especially true in the San Juan School district. We believe that improvement could happen if we had more resources. We ask the State of Utah to assist our student's achievement and also to provide more resources to our educational system in terms of traditional language revitalization."

He also addressed the Navajo Nation's continued challenge with the San Juan School District's push to redraw the election district lines for its school board members.

Vice President Nez said that San Juan County's 2016 school board redistricting plan is an effort by the county to dilute Navajo voting strength by unjustly packing Native Americans into two districts. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 protects Navajo voters. Accordingly, the new school

board election districts must allow three districts from which Navajos can elect candidates of their choice. The 2016 school board redistricting map submitted to the court by the county does not adequately protect and enhance Navajo voting strength in San Juan County school board elections, he said.

As both the Utah Governor Gary Herbert and Lieutenant Governor Spencer J. Cox were in attendance, the vice president thanked them for being there to listen to all the tribal concerns brought forth during the caucus. He also thanked the eight leaders who were there to speak on behalf of their tribes.

"I just want to say thank you. Thanks to the State of Utah for the ways in which we have nurtured the state to state, nation to nation relationship. It shows that you have a heart for Indian country for being here," he said. "It's good to be here amongst the tribal leaders and the leaders of the great state of Utah."

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