



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 18, 2016

Communications Office
Office of the President and Vice President
Mihio Manus
Michele J. Crank
OPVP Communications

PRESIDENT BEGAYE TESTIFIES AT SENATE HEARING ON IMPROVING CULTURAL PROTECTION LAWS



President Russell Begaye testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs oversight field hearing calling on Congress and the federal government to join together to enhance protection of sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony.

ALBUQUERQUE—President Russell Begaye called on lawmakers and administration officials to improve upon cultural resource protection laws. He testified at a U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs oversight field hearing on the “Theft, Illegal Possession, Sale, Transfer and Export of Tribal Cultural Items” at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center.

President Begaye requested Congress and the federal government to join together diplomatically and through passage of legislation to “enhance protection and repatriation of our human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony. These laws must have timelines, unambiguous definitions, defined roles and responsibilities and teeth to enforce their compliance.”

The field hearing is important as several measures to address these issues have been drafted and are circulating in both the House and Senate. The Senate passed the PROTECT Patrimony Resolution, H. Con. Res. 122. When the House reconvenes following the general election the Navajo Nation expects the House to take action on the Senate amended concurrent resolution. This will demonstrate a powerful message by the Congress that they are serious about protecting Native American cultural patrimony.

Additionally, Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) introduced S 3127, the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act. The bill would prohibit the exporting of sacred Native American items and increase penalties for stealing and illegally trafficking tribal cultural patrimony. Sens. Tom Udall (D-N.M), Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), John McCain (R-Ariz.), Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Steve Daines (R-Mont.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) and Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) have signed on as cosponsors of the bill. Earlier this year in June, the Navajo Nation Council passed a resolution supporting the bill.

“By passing these cultural protection laws, Congress will take another step in making history in its endeavor to make the Navajo Nation and all tribes across the country whole after experiencing the erosion of their cultural identities. You will contribute to our hózhó, the beauty way of our life,” said President Begaye.

###