

JOE SHIRLEY, JR.
President

FRANK J. DAYISH, JR.
Vice President



SHARON CLAHCHISCHILLIAGE
Executive Director
WASHINGTON OFFICE

NAVAJO NATION WASHINGTON OFFICE

For immediate release:
December 7, 2005

Contact: Michael Wero, NNWO
202-775-0393 x206
202-607-5507 cell

Navajo Nation Washington Office provides forecast of 2006 federal activity to Council delegates, tribal staff

GALLUP, N.M. – Now is the time to reassert the Navajo Nation to set priorities and plan for to Fiscal Year 2009 while assuring current programs are following federal requirements if they are funded by external funds.



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., addresses the opening session of the Navajo Nation Washington Office Legislative Update this week in Gallup, N.M. NNWO Legislative Associate and Communications Officer Michael Wero discussed the current legislative climate

This was the message to Navajo Nation Council delegates, Navajo division directors and their staff, and judicial branch staff at the Navajo Nation Washington Office's update session Dec. 6 & 7.

NNWO staff emphasized that the trend in Washington is that lawmakers will continue to tighten fiscal belts while trying to pay for military missions overseas and hurricane damage reconstruction

"An estimated 70 percent of Navajo programs come from the federal government," said Sharon Clahchischilliage, Navajo Nation Executive Director. "Navajo Nation programs need to make sure they are in compliance in submitting paperwork regarding their activities. It's easier to continue an established program than to try to

get it back if it was cancelled due to non-compliance."

The two-day conference began with remarks from the Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr. The President thanked the 100 participants for recognizing the importance of becoming better informed to the activities in Washington, D.C.

– MORE –

"I'm glad to see the amount of participation and importance the three branches have placed on understanding the federal process," he said. "I hope everyone here will work with the Washington Office to ensure Navajo families will continue to receive the services and resources they need."

In the first general session of the morning, the five NNWO legislative associates, along Ms. Clahchischillage, gave an update on federal priorities as a fresh Congress and a re-elected President Bush began his second term.

They explained both the Bush Administration's and the Congress' initial goals of Social Security reform and making the 2001 tax cuts permanent, evaporated under the pressures of growing public dissatisfaction on the war in Iraq, damaging hurricanes in the South and the growing scandals involving Capitol Hill and the White House.

Other discussions dealt with the approaching national 2006 elections and whether the Republican Party could lose its majority in either or both chambers of Congress. All House of Representatives seats and one-third of Senate seats are up for re-election.

"Upcoming months will tell who voters will turn to coming into next November," said Michael Wero, an NNWO legislative associate. "Iraq, the economy, immigration policy and values, will determine if either party can get people to the polls and cast a ballot for them. If the electorate becomes disenchanted with Washington, they could also just stay home and not vote which could be more damaging for the Republicans."

Local U.S. congressional races include Republicans Rick Renzi (AZ-1), Heather Wilson (NM-1), Steve Pearce (NM-2), and Democrats Tom Udall (NM-3) and Jim Matheson (UT-2).

In the other chamber, Senators Jon Kyl (R-AZ), Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) are also seeking to retain their seats.

"The Navajo Nation needs to remember that a change of either majority in Congress will not mean an automatic increase of funding for the Navajo Nation," said Simon Boyce, NNWO legislative associate. "Bills will still have to be paid no matter who hold a majority."

The afternoon of the first day saw the conference break into discussion groups regarding issues such as education, public safety, natural resources, telecommunications, housing and gaming. Each associate reviewed the status of various pieces of federal legislation, and took questions and comments from participants on how to better the communications between the NNWO and Navajo programs and leadership.

"I enjoyed working with our group on determining what additional federal information they need to create a smoother process, which will eventually help to sustain or increase funding levels for their programs," said Javier Ramos, the NNWO legislative associate who follows education, judiciary, taxes and veterans affairs.

The second day of the conference started with an overview of the relationship between the Navajo Nation and the State of Arizona. Milton Bluehouse, Jr., the recently-appointed Executive Director of the Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs, gave the audience his update for the office and explained ways Navajo can better inform state leaders of the needs of its people.

"I wanted to assure tribal leaders that this office is here to assist tribes and their programs with outreach to state leadership and their government agencies." Mr. Bluehouse said.

– MORE –

Finishing the conference, NNWO legislative associate Darren Pete provided a review of the federal appropriations process, reviewed recent trends of Congressional funding of Native programs and gave suggestions on how Navajo can better position itself against projected cuts in national social services.

“We have been fortunate that Congressional leaders have continued to limit funding impacts for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service,” he said. “However, in light of increasing deficits there are growing calls to find places to reduce spending. We need to be able to show the results of our program spending because Native America will be in their sights.”

#