

Navajo Nation Council Office of the Speaker  
Contact: Sararesa Begay, Public Information Officer  
(928) 871-6384  
sararesabegay@navajo.org  
<http://www.navajonationcouncil.org>  
or  
Deswood Tome, Navajo Nation Washington Office  
202-682-7390 or 202-607-5507 (wireless)

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **Navajo Judiciary Committee Chairman Spends Sovereignty Day Working to Fund Navajo Nation Supreme Court**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Navajo Nation Council Judiciary Committee Chairperson Kee Allen Begay, Jr. spent Monday, April 23, "Sovereignty Day," which is a Navajo Nation tribal holiday, working to secure funding for the future of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court building, a proposed \$11 million facility.

"We're continuing our efforts to work with Congress," Chairperson Begay said. "I would like to see, just looking at the plans, a facility that portrays the Navajo justice system."

Chairperson Begay (Many Farms/Round Rock) met with the staff of U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) and Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) advocating for construction funding for the Navajo Nation Supreme Court. Chairman Begay also met with the staff for Sen. Tim Johnson (D-SD).

The proposed construction of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court building is planned on a 5.982 acre site. Funds from the Navajo Nation government include \$1.5 million for architectural/engineering as well as environmental assessments and archaeological clearances.

"The Navajo judicial system is the best of both western and Navajo traditional laws," Chairperson Begay said. "A new Supreme Court building will give us a sense of sovereignty at work."

Navajo court statistics show for 2006 a total of 81,332 cases of which 21,304 remain open serving 250,000 people in a 25,000 square mile area.

The Navajo Nation Supreme Court today holds hearings in the Butler building which measures no more than 432 square feet.

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The draft legislative bill provides for authorization in grants to be made by the U.S. Department of Justice that will fund the construction of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court building. The legislative initiative has the support of the Navajo Nation Council Intergovernmental Relations committee.

Begay's visit to Washington, D.C. comes after last week's coordinated efforts of President Joe Shirley, Jr. "I want to thank the President," Chairman Begay said. "For meeting with congressional leaders in advocating for the Supreme Court."

President Shirley met with Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), Rick Renzi (R-AZ), and members of the House Resources Committee affirming his support for the proposed project. The president sent letters to various House and Senate members, co-signed by Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale) and Navajo Nation Chief Justice Herb Yazzie.

The Senate Appropriations subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science is expected to hold a mark-up hearing sometime next month. Navajo Nation Washington Office Legislative Counsel Javier Ramos is working with House members and staff on similar introductions in the House.

The Navajo Nation government observed Monday, April 23, 2007, as Sovereignty Day, a tribal holiday commemorating a U.S. Supreme Court victory in 1985, which affirmed tribal sovereignty.

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