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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Speaker Morgan meets Utah Gov. Huntsman on Utah Indian Caucus Day

SALT LAKE CITY – Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. thanked Navajo Nation Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Pinedale/Iyanbito) last Wednesday afternoon during a meeting for his friendship “to carry on this sovereign to sovereign” relationship between the Navajo Nation and the state of Utah.

Speaker Morgan along with a Navajo delegation consisting Dr. James J. Davis Jr., chief of staff; Philip Kinlechee, legislative adviser and Sararesa Begay, public information officer traveled to Utah’s capitol for the one-day Utah Indian Caucus Day that recognizes the state’s five major Native Nations. They are the Ute Nation; the Navajo Nation; the Paiute Nation; the Goshute Nation and the Shoshoni Nation.

“Participating in the Utah Indian Caucus Day was immensely productive and informative,” Speaker Morgan said. “A number of Utah Navajo issues were presented and discussed with Gov. Huntsman and Gayle McKeachie, the governor’s adviser on rural affairs.”

Speaker Morgan, his staff, Utah Navajo leaders and other Navajos brought key concerns to the attention of Gov. Huntsman and his staff such as the Navajo Nation Revitalization Fund; a Human Remains Act and the Utah Navajo Trust Fund.

“With Utah oil and gas taxes collection from the Navajo Nation portion it has been at a maximum amount that may not exceed 2 million in a state fiscal year,” Speaker Morgan said as he addressed the Utah Senate Democrats. “With the high rise of oil and gas prices, this ceiling limit is outdated. I would recommend increasing the privies from a 2 million cap to a 4 million because these tax benefits help Utah Navajo Chapters with their community development needs.”

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Morgan added that this legislation is before the Utah legislature as “House Bill No. 19.”

“With the passing of ‘H.B. 19’ it would greatly help improve our people’s lives living within the Utah portion of the Navajo Nation, by making more funding available for their capital improvement projects.”

A current Memorandum of Understanding that exists between the Navajo Nation and the state Utah where many issues of mutual concern between the Navajo Nation and the state of Utah and other entities are addressed. The MOU which was updated in 1996 essentially for strengthening the government-to-government relationship between the Navajo Nation and the state of Utah.

“A lot of our leaders believe that the MOU needs to be reviewed. With the MOU, we must recognize and respect the sovereign status of both parties and choose to reaffirm the government-to-government relations,” Morgan said. “In addressing these issues in a timely manner the many issues of mutual concern between the Navajo Nation and the state of Utah, and its subdivisions, by discussing these issues of concern thoroughly among each other before resorting to litigation. Let this be something that does not have to be considered, so we ask for your continuing support with this MOU.”

The Navajo leadership agreed to have an MOU with amendments to the state of Utah in 30 days.

According to Navajo Utah lobbyist, Paul Tsosie, of Tsosie and Hatch, the previous MOU “was general and not action oriented.”

Another area of concern for the Navajo Nation includes, the Human Remains Act, Senate Bill 204, according to Speaker Morgan.

“This bill provides for a process of ancient human remains that are discovered on non-federal lands, that are not state lands,” Morgan said. “By addressing the determination of ownership and the disposition of Native American remains discovered on non-federal lands.”

Lastly, Speaker Morgan discussed the Utah Navajo Trust Fund, and the administration of funds from the oil royalties from 16 leases northeast of Montezuma Creek.

“UNTF is a state agency which receives 37.5 percent of the 12.5 percent of the oil royalties from the 16 leases in Montezuma Creek, 62.5 percent from this area along with 100 percent and from Aneth, Red Mesa and Mexican Water that goes to the Navajo Nation,” Speaker Morgan said. “The administrators of these funds channel the resources for the Utah Navajo communities and their families for various capital improvement programs. UNTF has a board of trustees which is a three-member board that the State Treasurer serves as a member along with the Finance Division Director of the state of Utah. The third UNTF member is appointed by the Governor’s office.”

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Morgan added that “due to this matter, we are asking that an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation be selected by the Navajo Nation to this position.”

“By selecting a Navajo representative is vital in meeting the vested interests of our people in overseeing the funding expenditures and decision-making for our people.”

Currently, there are no Navajos on the UNTF Board of Trustees. The State Treasurer serves as a member and chair and the Finance Division Director of the state of Utah serves as a second member. The third member is appointed by the Governor’s office.

The board receives recommendations from the Utah Dineh Committee for various projects and provides funding approvals, non-approvals or other recommendations as well as providing general oversight on all issues affecting the trust fund. The current board members are: Ed Alter, chair, State Treasurer; Kim Thorne, State Finance Division Director and Lynn Stevens, the Governor Appointee.

Utah Navajo leaders such as council delegates Davis Filfred (Mexican Water/Aneth/Red Mesa); Kenneth Maryboy (Mexican Water/Aneth/Red Mesa) and Clarence Rockwell of the Navajo Utah Commission. Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Man Farms/Round Rock), judiciary committee chairperson, also attended the Utah Indian Caucus Day.

The creation of the trust fund was created by the Congressional Act of 1933. The act was promulgated for the express purpose of adding federal lands located in San Juan County, Utah to the northern portion of the Navajo Nation. The Act authorized the state of Utah to collect 37.5 percent of any oil and gas royalties produced on the Aneth Extension and use the proceeds for “...the tuition of Indian Children in white schools and/or the building or maintenance of roads...”

The 1933 Act was amended by the Act of 1968. This amendment deleted the previous purpose of the Act and substituted the following purpose of the Act and substituted the following purposes: “...for the health, education and general welfare of the Navajo Indians residing in San Juan County, Utah...” This is the purpose of the trust fund.

Then during February 1992, the Utah State Legislature created the current Utah Navajo Trust Fund under Utah Code Annotated (UCA) 63-88. This statute requires accountability for expenditures and organized the structure of the administration of the trust fund, Board of Trustees and the Utah Dineh Committee.