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## Speaker Morgan Raises Concerns on the BIA Fiscal Year 2009 Funding Levels

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale) met with several high-level Bureau of Indian Affairs officials during March 19-21 to state his concerns on the BIA 2009 Budget fiscal priorities, and said the solution for increased funding for Native American tribes is that the BIA must be a priority within the Department of Interior.

After Speaker Morgan presented the Navajo Nation's budget fiscal priorities, to a general assembly of Native leaders and officials, he received the only applause when he completed his presentation.

At this session, Speaker Morgan was accompanied by several members of the Navajo Nation Council, commented on several key topics of the Navajo Nation Statement of Fiscal Year 2009. Those in attendance with Morgan were Navajo Nation Council delegates Hope MacDonald Lone Tree (Coalmine Canyon/Toh Nanees Dizi), Leonard Chee (Birdsprings/Leupp/Tolani Lake), Ervin Keeswood Sr. (Tse Daa Kaan), and Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Many Farms/Round Rock).

The dominant theme of Morgan's statement centered on the under funding of the federal programs presently serving the Navajo Nation.

"The Navajo Nation must impress upon the BIA to not formulate a budget that continues to decrease funding to the BIA fiscal year 2009 planning budget amounts," stated a 17-page Navajo Nation statement submitted by Speaker Morgan to Department of Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorn and BIA Assistant Secretary Carl Artman.

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Funding for Indian Self-Determination Act programs is the single most pressing budget issue facing our Navajo communities for fiscal year 2006 through fiscal year 2009. Additional reductions to the ISDA budgets only hurt the health, education and development of Native children, elderly and our natural resources, according to the Navajo Nation statement.

Since the fiscal year 2004 level to fiscal year 2006, President Bush has requested significant decreases in the BIA budget, the Navajo Nation document continues.

“The President’s fiscal year 2008 budget request, although \$7 million more than the fiscal year 2007 request and \$1 million below the fiscal year 2007 enacted levels, is approximately \$77 million less than the fiscal year 2004 enacted amount of \$2.305 billion. At a time when some others are moving forward, this administration consistently moves the Navajo Nation and other Native Nations backwards.”

Additionally, Speaker Morgan told the officials there have “been increases in areas such as the National Park Service and forestry.”

“Are not Native Americans more important than the National Parks and forests?” Speaker Morgan asked, noting that Native American people “have tried everything by receiving daily rations during the mid-1800s to survive.” “Throughout the various federal policies, we have survived, and we are still here.”

“This last decade we provided the federal government with our ‘unmet needs’ to no avail,” Speaker Morgan noted. “We provided ‘performance data’ which saw no increases in budget areas, we are now going through this process of providing ‘priorities,’ will this process see an increase in funding?”

The Indian Affairs National Meeting was a forum attended by tribal leaders to provide for tribal input into the 2009 budget formulation. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget routinely works two to three years ahead in preparing the president’s budget that is annually submitted to congress for passage.

The Indian Affairs National Budget meeting hosted auxiliary work shops and presentations to acquaint tribal leaders and budgeters with federal budget updates and changes.

The TBAC Working Group Presentation of Recommendations and Proposed Protocols, was facilitated by Ed Thomas and Bob Middleton for fiscal years 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Government-Wide Indian Country Budget Presentation facilitated by Jackie Johnson, National Congress of American Indians and Becoming More Effective Advocates for Indian Programs facilitated by Peter Kiefhaber, Senate Appropriations Committee and Greg Knadle, House Appropriations Committee.

Other highlights include a tribal caucus consisting of carryover priorities, advocating for Indian Program and reviewing a protocol document.

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Speaker Morgan was the only Navajo Nation governmental branch chief in attendance, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley Jr. was represented at the national budget meeting by Arbin Mitchell, who oversees community development.

Three Navajo Nation priorities were highlighted. Education, which included requests for restoration of Johnson O'Malley funding, public safety, petitions for detention facility construction and the Navajo Nation courts, to increase TPA money for tribal courts.