



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Delegates advocate for development of a Congressional bill to benefit the Eastern Agency to three New Mexico Congressmen

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahi, Whiterock) and Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) met with New Mexico Congressman Ben Lujan (District-3) and Senators Martin Heinrich (D-NM), and Tom Udall (D-NM) on May 29 to advocate for the development of a congressional bill that would enact the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project (NIIP) and Navajo Exchange Legislative Initiative (NELI).

The 22nd Navajo Nation Council passed resolution CO-47-12 last October requesting for Congress to resolve the federal government’s obligations to the NIIP by giving its sole authority to the Navajo Nation and to take into trust Navajo lands in the Eastern Agency.

“After the Council passed the resolution, we provided a presentation to the congressmen and they agreed to support it,” said Delegate Yazzie. “Congressman Lujan is going to sponsor the legislation for the Navajo People.”

In 1962, President Kennedy signed legislation authorizing an agreement between the Navajo Nation, New Mexico and the United States to divert water from the San Juan Basin in exchange for a 110,630-acre irrigated farm, now known as Navajo Agriculture Products Industry (NAPI).

As of today the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project is only 80 percent complete.

Delegate Simpson, a member of the Budget and Finance Committee, stated that he and Delegate Yazzie urged the New Mexico leaders not to ignore the projects, even during the sequestration.

According to Delegate Simpson, NIIP used to be appropriated \$30 million per year. The project is now only appropriated \$3 million.

“At this rate it will take 150 years to complete,” said Simpson

One portion of the bill aims to pass sole authority of NIIP from the United States to the Navajo Nation and includes necessary funds for its future construction, maintenance and rehabilitation.

The bill will also consolidate most of the Bureau of Land Management lands in the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation and place them into trust.

“These lands have always belonged to the Navajo people. We are working to move them into trust,” Delegate Yazzie said. “BLM is supportive and wants to give back the acreage of land.”

The Eastern Navajo Land Commission (ENLC) – which consists of Council Delegates Charles Damon II (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh), George Apachito (Alamo, Ramah, Tohajiilee), Delegate Simpson, and Delegate Yazzie – worked to develop legislation that combines NELI and NIIP. “

“NIIP is similar to the NELI project, instead of two separate bills, Eastern Navajo Land Commission and the congressional leaders suggest one comprehensive bill,” Delegate Yazzie said.

“I feel good about it being passed because Udall is a ranking member in D.C.,” Delegate Yazzie said, adding that the rights of Navajo People in the Eastern Agency are undeniable and by fixing the current situation, it will encourage development.

“This problem started back in 1907, and we as Navajo Leaders are working to resolve it with the help of the three New Mexico Congressmen,” said Delegate Simpson. “We are carrying through with an initiative supported by thirty-one Eastern Agency Chapters, the Eastern Navajo Land Commission, and the 22nd Navajo Nation Council.”

Delegate Yazzie remains optimistic about the meeting, and believes if all parties work together, the legislation can be passed within one year.

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