



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council continues to push for Navajo Indian Irrigation Project funding

WASHINGTON D.C. – The 23rd Navajo Nation Council continued its efforts last week to coordinate with congressional leadership and Navajo Agricultural Products Industry to push for the completion of Block 9 of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project and to increase funding for operations and maintenance costs that are obligated under Public Law 87-483, which was passed by congress in 1962.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Council Delegate Steven Begay, and Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr., NAPI CEO Wilton Charley and operations

and maintenance manager Lionel Haskie, met with congressional members, White House officials, officials with the U.S. Department of the Interior, and congressional staff members.

Council members informed numerous congressional leaders and federal officials that the Navajo Nation's top priority is to complete Block 9, in addition to securing more federal funding for operations and maintenance costs to maintain and improve the NIIP's infrastructure.

The federal government is obligated through Public Law 87-483, to completing Block 9 that consists of nearly 10,000 –acres and to provide O&M funding each year through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. However, federal funding has decreased from approximately \$24 million annually to a current low of \$3.3 million.

Navajo Nation leaders told the officials that the NAPI enterprise is not able to reach its full capacity in terms of revenue, production, and job creation due to the funding deficiencies.

In April, the Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'iyátí' Committee approved legislation that created the NIIP Negotiation Subcommittee for the purpose of negotiating an MOA with the federal



PHOTO: (left to right) Council Delegate Steven Begay, U.S. Rep. Mike Conaway (R-TX), and Speaker LoRenzo Bates in Washington D.C. on Nov. 13, 2017.

government regarding the funding and completion of the NIIP, to advocate for O&M funding, and other funding through the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act.

The subcommittee members include Council Delegates Steven Begay, Benjamin Bennett, Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Leonard Tsosie, and Speaker Bates.

In April, the subcommittee members visited the NIIP to see firsthand the deteriorating infrastructure, including the main water canal.

“The purpose of the visits with congressional members and staff was to provide firsthand knowledge in order to help us move the initiatives of NAPI forward,” said Speaker Bates.

Operations and maintenance manager Lionel Haskie, said that NAPI has put forth its own funding and labor for O&M due to the lack of adequate funding from the BIA each year rather than having the infrastructure continue to deteriorate.



PHOTO: A portion of the deteriorated water canal at the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project.

Haskie estimates that it will cost NAPI approximately \$3 million to fix a 1,000-foot portion of the water canal, which should be paid for by the BIA with federal funding in accordance with Public Law 87-483. He also noted that NAPI is assuming the responsibility of maintaining the roads within the 80,000-acre farm, which is also the BIA’s obligation.

Although NAPI is spending millions of dollars each year on O&M costs, the enterprise continues to advance further development including a new 120-acre field that will be used to grow and produce organic products such as melons, onions, and squash.

NAPI officials said they plan to market their organic products on the open market and would also like to partner with local schools and grocery stores to make their products available to students and local community members.

At the conclusion of the tour, the subcommittee members and NAPI officials said they look forward to meeting and working together to pursue the completion of Block 9 and to increase federal funding for operations and maintenance expenses. The subcommittee is tentatively scheduled to meet again in May.

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