23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
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Council members advocate for school safety and child welfare issues at the Utah Tribal Leaders Meeting

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah – Council Delegates Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tółikan, Red Mesa) and Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) attended the Utah Tribal Leaders quarterly meeting held last Thursday and Friday, and participated in discussions related to school safety and child welfare issues in the Utah Navajo area. Each of the delegates represents Navajo communities within the state of Utah.

The Utah Tribal Leaders is comprised of tribal leadership from throughout the state including the Navajo Nation, Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Skull Valley Band of Goshute, Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation, Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, Paiute Indian Tribe, and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe.

Delegate Filfred, who serves as the vice chair for the UTL, said with the recent gun violence occurring on the national level the Navajo Utah Commission collaborated with the Utah Department of Public Safety and the Utah Highway Patrol to conduct an Active Shooter Threat Training at two Navajo schools.

“Interest and attendance were good at both schools, considering their isolated locations and limited law enforcement presence from the Navajo Nation, state, and county police agencies,” said Delegate Filfred.

He recommended that the tribal leaders consider providing the same training within their schools and government offices. He stressed that schools and offices are more likely to be targeted by an active shooter than a building being susceptible to fire, and said active shooter drills should take place as much as fire drills.

In addition to school safety, Delegate Filfred mentioned that public hearings were recently held in Bluff and Monticello regarding voting districts within the Utah San Juan County. He said the public hearings were intended to build awareness and give individual county citizens an opportunity to share their opinions and preference. U.S. District Court Judge Robert Shelby ordered the public hearings, according to Delegate Filfred.

Delegate Brown raised concerns regarding the Indian Child Welfare Act. He stated that tribes need to unite on the issue to protect the act and Native American children.

“ICWA is being attacked on all fronts and we need to come together for our native children. I am hoping to sponsor legislation on behalf of the Navajo Nation to assert our position to keep the act in tact. We want our native children protected and we want to bring them back to their homelands,” said Delegate Brown.

He added that it should be stressed that the term “family” in native communities is not limited to immediate family, but that historically, many native families have always adopted non-biological children as their own and raised them with cultural and language teachings, and that ICWA carries on that tradition today.

Delegate Brown also met with University of Utah professor of law and law school dean, Robert A. Adler, and attorney Heather J. Tanana, regarding a proposed initiative to create a Native American law program that would focus on federal and tribal law.

“New Mexico and Arizona have amazing American Indian law programs and I think it’s time to initiate one in the state of Utah. We want to broaden the horizons of future Indian law students by providing them an additional program to take advantage of,” said Delegate Brown.

Other topics that were discussed at the Utah Tribal Leaders meeting were juvenile justice and youth offender rehabilitation, reports from Utah state departments, foster and family programs, and a report from Utah’s Native American Legislative Liaison Committee.

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