



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 9, 2018

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Navajo Hopi Land Commission members call on the Office of the President to prioritize rehabilitation efforts for relocatees

WINDOW ROCK – Members of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission met on Monday, and continued calling on the Office of the President and Vice President to take action to increase the effectiveness of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office, which is tasked with rehabilitating and improving the social, economic, and educational conditions of Navajo people and communities affected by the adverse impacts of the Navajo-Hopi Indian Land Settlement Act of 1974, and to make land selections for the benefit of people adversely impacted by relocation.

NHLC vice chair Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) issued several letters on behalf of the Commission to President Russell Begaye, requesting to meet to discuss many critical issues that affect Navajo people who were relocated due to the Bennett Freeze, such as the potential closure of the Office of Navajo-Hopi Indian Relocation. However, the requests have gone unanswered.

Among their responsibilities, the nine-member commission is authorized to advise the president concerning all matters relating to land use conflicts with the Hopi Tribe, and to speak and act for the Navajo Nation with respect to the land selection and land exchange provisions.

Commission members outlined several initiatives that are not being addressed by the NHLC Office including the need to finalize a fund management plan for the Relocatee Rehabilitation Trust Fund, which currently has over \$2.5 million to assist impacted Navajo people and communities, but the funds cannot be used until the plan is finalized and approved. Delegate Witherspoon stated that the commission has waited over six years for the NHLC Office to finalize the fund management plan.

The NHLC Office has yet to hire a third party inspector to assess poorly constructed homes that were provided by the Office of Navajo-Hopi Indian Relocation, despite the fact that the Navajo Nation Council approved a carryover of \$156,000 to the NHLC Office for this purpose. With the current fiscal year scheduled to end at the end of October, Delegate Witherspoon pointed out that the NHLC Office now has less than two months to encumber the carryover funds. He also

stressed the importance of having a third party conduct the housing assessments to provide independent, fair, and unbiased results.

The Commission noted that there remains a need for the Navajo Hopi Land Commission Office and Department of Justice to develop agreements for the Navajo Nation Division of Transportation to expand their use of land in Tse Bonito and for property in the LeChee community for Navajo tourism to use for additional revenue to benefit the Relocatee Rehabilitation Trust Fund.

The Navajo Hopi Land Commission members said they remain open to meeting with the President and the NHLHC Office to move these issues forward.

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