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Office of the Speaker

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MEDIA CONTACTS
Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Law and Order Committee continues to promote highway safety for U.S. Route 550

PHOTO: Law and Order Committee members Council Delegate Otto Tso, Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie, and Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. met with Huerfano Chapter and surrounding chapters during a Law and Order Committee meeting in Huerfano, N.M. on March 26, 2018.

HUERFANO, N.M. – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee received a report from the New Mexico Public Regulatory commissioner Linda Lovejoy, Nageezi Chapter community service coordinator Danny Simpson, and Huerfano Chapter community service coordinator Larry J. Bonney, regarding the safety of U.S. Route 550, a four-lane highway that connects Bernalilo, N.M. and Montrose, C.O., and aligns with the Navajo communities of Nageezi, Huerfano, and Counselor.

The report highlighted the need for Navajo Nation police officers within the region and concerns regarding alcohol sales at a local convenience store in Huerfano, located approximately 28-miles southeast of Farmington, N.M.

LOC member Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) sympathized with the community's concerns and stated that the proximity of alcohol sales greatly influences the safety of commuter along U.S. Route 550.

"All the roads on the Navajo Nation are uncertain and prone to accidents. Drunk drivers cause many of the highway accidents and fatalities on the Nation. There are many bordertown convenience stores that sell alcohol and we need to eliminate those sales to deter accidents," said Delegate Tso, who also questioned if data is available regarding U.S. Route 550.

According to Lovejoy, the New Mexico Department of Transportation was to have conducted a study of U.S. Route 550, however, it is unclear if the department completed the study.

LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) recommended that Huerfano Chapter as well as surrounding chapters advocate for highway safety at the state level.

"U.S. Route 550 is within the jurisdiction of San Juan County and they should be able to provide public safety services for the highway. Chapter leadership needs to explore all avenues to promote highway safety and I am willing to assist," said Delegate Begay, who also stated that he previously met with N.M. Gov. Susana Martinez regarding the highway.

According to Simpson, the surrounding chapters have been working collaboratively to push efforts to decrease the speed limit of the highway and to eliminate alcohol sales at the convenient store. The chapters also worked together to seek funding to construct the existing police substation within the region, which is not utilized by the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety, added Simpson.

In response to the concerns, Navajo Nation chief of police Phillip B. Francisco stated that the Navajo Nation Police Department has only 200 police officers covering 27,000 square miles of land and there are not enough resources to address all highway issues across the Navajo Nation.

At the end of the discussion, LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) also encouraged the communities to attend a meeting with NMDOT commissioner Billy Moore at Thoreau Chapter on Wednesday, to address their concerns.

The Law and Order Committee approved the report with a 3-0 vote.

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