



Senator Heinrich Discusses ARPA Funds Update and Priorities with the 24th Navajo Nation Council

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh) and members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council met with U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) to discuss updates on the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funding allocations to the Navajo Nation.

“This focus is on delivering more resources to tribal nations by learning what’s working and what is not working,” said Sen. Heinrich. “This has been in the works for a long time for the ARPA funds to be given to the Navajo Nation.”

Sen. Heinrich thanked the 24th Navajo Nation Council for allowing him to provide an update on his advocacy in Washington, D.C. Such as the Payroll Protection Program, which provided tribal enterprises the opportunity to apply so their employees could stay on payroll during the pandemic under the CARES Act.

Speaker Damon updated Sen. Heinrich on the ARPA funds by sharing that the funds first need to be accepted by the Navajo Nation Council through our legislative process. An expenditure or fund management plan will follow before allocation of the funds can be made.

“With the \$1.8 million that was received from the ARPA funds, we are identifying the priorities for our Nation and we are currently conducting work sessions since receiving the funds to see what the priority sectors and needs are for our people,” said Speaker Damon. “Water, power, broadband, housing, and infrastructure projects are going to be the priority for that legislation.”

Law & Order Committee Chairwoman, Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock), expressed her strong advocacy on the need for public safety infrastructure on the Navajo Nation. Citing dilapidated buildings that are across the Nation, while also requesting funds for 16 substations, 4 courthouses, 1 peacemaking buildings, 2 complexes, assistance with the 105L Program, and the 638 Contract Dollars the Navajo Nation receives.

During the meeting, Speaker Damon, on behalf of the Navajo Nation Council, urged Sen. Heinrich on several matters such as the land status issues in Eastern Agency In New Mexico. Eastern Agency continues to be challenged with land statuses that create development barriers. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (B.I.A) will need to consult with the Navajo Nation on Rights-of-Way processes for compliance.

Additionally, the Navajo Nation should be able to have the delegation from the B.I.A. to process and approve our own rights of way through processes like the National Environmental Protection Agency.

Citing that the Navajo Nation can build major water trunk lines to areas in dire need of water, but leaves the question of can the Indian Health Service (I.H.S.) complete the waterline to homes? However, I.H.S. does not have the building capacity to take on the project as they are short staffed.

If they were to take on ARPA projects, then they would have to redesignate all of their staff off of current projects. Leading to Speaker Damon to ask Sen. Heinrich if he could assist I.H.S.

“We don’t have the building capacity to utilize these funds from ARPA to adequately complete projects for the nation,” said Speaker Damon. “Currently we have about \$500 to \$700 million dollars waiting to be used on building and completing projects that are not ARPA related.”

When asked if the Navajo Nation Council would be able to expend \$280 million from the ARPA funds, Speaker Damon stated, “The Navajo Nation is ready to spend \$280 million on unfinished projects that were approved by the Navajo Nation through the CARES fund received last year, something that our Navajo Nation enterprises, contractors, and businesses can carry out, however, there is no building capacity after the first year — that is the issue.”

Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Chairman, Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tónaneesdizi), expressed his frustration for Navajo People in the Western Agency as there is great infrastructure needs, especially with the Bennett Freeze Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute Area.

“Our people were penalized through the Former Bennett Freeze (FBF) and as a result, it halted infrastructure for 46 years — depriving our people of the American Dream.” Said Delegate Tso. “The federal government can give money to other countries to rebuild but what about the Navajo Nation? Other countries were never subjugated to such policies. Does the federal government think of us as a people of the past? Come to Western Navajo and see a family who lives on the dirt floor with no water and electricity.”

Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council expressed concerns about federal lobbyists who are wanting to put a limit on the second phase of ARPA funds distribution. However, Sen. Heinrich assured council members that due to no motions being made to change the language within the bill, then ARPA would not be affected.

Ending the meeting, Sen. Heinrich expressed his continued advocacy for the Navajo Nation and will reach out to fellow congressional colleagues of his to support the Navajo People.

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