Brewer signs SB 1317, allows tribes stake in Aviation Fund

WINDOW ROCK—After a lengthy six-month process winding its way through the Arizona Legislature, Senate Bill 1317 was signed into law by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer on June 20, 2013.

Sponsored by Senator Jack Jackson, Jr., SB 1317 allows tribally-owned airports to participate in the Arizona Department of Transportation’s Aviation Fund program.

The purpose of the fund is to allow competitive grants for infrastructure and improvements to public airports in Arizona. The fund is financed by aviation fuel and aircraft registration fees imposed upon pilots in Arizona.

There is no taxpayer dollars included in the Arizona Aviation Fund.

“This bill is a great opportunity for the 14 tribally-owned airports of Arizona to compete with other public airports to improve their runways and other needs,” said Paulson Chaco, director of the Navajo Division of Transportation.

He said pilots from these tribally-owned airports have contributed to the aviation fund since its inception and that it is only fair they are allowed to compete for approved infrastructure projects through the fund.

“The Navajo Nation has five airports in Arizona that can benefit from this legislation. We look forward to improving mobility for the northern part of the state,” Chaco said.

The Navajo Nation owns airports in the Arizona communities of Chinle, Ganado, Kayenta, Tuba City and Window Rock.

The responsibility of guiding the Navajo Nation’s airports is shouldered by Arlando Teller, program manager for the Department of Airport Management.

He explained that the seed for SB 1317 was planted in 2011. The Arizona Airports Association initially supported the bill but cited concerns that tabled the legislation.

“They were supportive of allowing tribal airports to become eligible to utilize state aviation grants but they questioned the differing regulatory environment such as taxation and how tribes would pay into the program,” Teller explained.

Eventually in Dec. 2012, AAA’s new president, Corinne Nystrom, supported amending the Arizona Revised Statutes 28-8202, to include tribal
The Department of Airport Management is responsible for the seven Navajo Nation airports in Arizona and New Mexico. Five of the airports are located in the Arizona communities of Chinle, Ganado, Kayenta, Tuba City and Window Rock.

The Window Rock Airport is at an elevation of 6,750 feet and covers an area of 88 acres. The airport is located one nautical mile south of the central business district of Window Rock, Ariz. The airport has one runway measuring 7,000-feet by 75-feet and averages about 5,000 general aviation aircraft operations per year, or 13 flights per day. (Photo by Rick Abasta)