



Joint Press Release

Navajo Nation Office
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Navajo Nation leaders meet to address top priorities

TWIN ARROWS, Ariz.— For the first time in tribal history, Navajo leaders from the Executive and Legislative Branches met to discuss the needs and priorities of the Navajo Nation to present a unified voice on the national and international stage.

These meetings will be continued for the duration of the administration and will also include the Judicial Branch to strengthen the voice and position of the Navajo Nation on Capitol Hill and the world at large.

The 23rd Navajo Nation Council and Speaker LoRenzo Bates hosted the meeting at the Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort. The purpose was to align the Nation's priorities and re-establish relations between the tribal branches of government to advocate and lobby on behalf of the Navajo people for funding from the county, state and federal levels.

"For years, dating back to before any of us took office, there has been this mentality that legislative is on one side of the street and executive is on the other side — that mindset needs to be eliminated to truly make progress," said Speaker Bates, emphasizing the need to be united and consistent when lobbying for external funding through the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

President Begaye provided an overview of the four pillars of his administration: Navajo veterans, elders and youth, infrastructure and job creation. He said the Navajo Nation's power and authority needs to be re-established nationally.

Speaking in Navajo, President Begaye said, "The time has come for us to execute the platform we presented during our campaign. We've been talking about it for a while now, the need to strengthen relations with the tribal branches and work together."

He said areas of discussion include water rights, expanding Navajo lands and establishing authority over surface and subsurface leasing.

He said only seven to 12 percent of the Navajo population holds authority over the land in the form of grazing permits, often impeding progress such as home site leasing, farming and infrastructure development.

“We want to open this up to make the process easier. We want to strengthen partnerships with county, state and federal officials,” said President Begaye. “The leveraging of funds is important to the Nation and when these funds are reverted, it really impacts our programs and communities.

“We also need to revitalize the local governance and strengthen the voice and needs of the people,” he added.

The chairpersons from each of the Council’s standing committees also presented their respective priorities as they relate to their oversight authorities, outlined in Title II of the Navajo Nation Code. Additionally, each delegate was provided time to present an overview of the needs and priorities within each of their respective chapters.

The two-day discussion covered a wide range of topics including water rights, economic development, rangeland issues, housing, public safety, external funding, scholarships, elderly care, and others.

Speaker Bates and President Begaye said the meeting marked the first time that elected leaders from the legislative and executive branches had met to discuss issues at length.

“The meeting allowed the elected officials to put everything on the table, from Nation-wide issues to the chapter level, so that we can now begin to align our priorities and to develop and finalize legislation that will allow us to move in the same direction,” added Speaker Bates.

Throughout the two-day meeting, elected officials emphasized the importance of establishing timelines and also to identify which initiatives can be handled administratively and which may require policy changes.

Vice President Nez said the priorities of the Executive and Legislative Branches are related and that the administration looks forward to working in tandem with the Council.

“I appreciate Speaker Bates mentioning the need for unification. To be able to speak with one voice, not only in D.C., but we’re players in the United Nations as well. We really need to have that one voice,” said Vice President Nez.

President Begaye and Council members agreed to meet later in the month to develop a plan of action to address the many issues discussed while stressing that continued communication is key to moving forward together.

“Ultimately, our goal is to establish priorities that help the Navajo People in the form of a resolution that the President and Council agree upon,” Speaker Bates stated.

“These priority areas I shared are from the Navajo people and we view this as a mandate. We will work on their behalf,” President Begaye said.