



February 08, 2017
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Vice President Nez meets with Gov. Herbert during 2017 American Indian Caucus Day



Vice President Nez shares the priorities of the Navajo Nation with Gov. Gary Herbert during the 2017 Utah American Indian Caucus Day.

SALT LAKE CITY— Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez met with Utah Gov. Gary Herbert and Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox during American Indian Caucus Day at the Utah State Capitol on Feb. 6.

Caucus day began with a signing ceremony with the Utah Department of Health and tribal leaders for the tribal consultation and conferment policy.

Afterward, tribal leaders met with Gov. Herbert and Lt. Gov. Cox behind closed doors in the Gold Room for government-to-government dialogue.

Passage of the Utah-Navajo Nation Reserved Water Rights Settlement was the main priority Vice President Nez

focused on during the meeting. He provided Gov. Herbert with the position paper from the Navajo Nation.

The issues from the Navajo Nation ranged from passage of the Utah-Navajo Nation Reserved Water Rights Settlement, protection of the Bears Ears National Monument, approving the NTUA purchase of Rocky Mountain Power, supporting the Indian Child Welfare Act, and assisting the San Juan School District for improving educational scores for Navajo students.

When the meeting concluded, the governor and tribal leaders reconvened at the Utah State Office Building Auditorium for the public meeting.

Gov. Herbert said the 45-day session is the heart and soul of what the state government does with regard to creating laws and spending money.

“The number one reason we get together with our state legislature is to create a budget, over \$16 billion, which is not an insignificant amount of money,” he said.

How the money is spent is a reflection of priorities, Gov. Herbert added, noting that he is a big believer in education.

“So, we put a lot of money, nearly 80 percent of all the money that comes into our budget, into education. To hire good teachers, the best and the brightest, and also for technology in the classroom,” he said.

The USAT System for San Juan County was an expanded educational opportunity that will be funded through collaboration with Utah State. Talent Ready Utah, another educational initiative, will bring businesses to work with educators in school districts to foster the growth of students.

“We’ve also set a goal, 25,000 new jobs in rural Utah over the next four years. That’s going to take some effort with local governments and tribal leaders,” Herbert said. “We recognize that government can’t do everything.”

Vice President Nez began his report by recognizing the Navajo tribal members in attendance at the meeting, which was more than half the people in the audience.

“I bring you greetings from President Russell Begaye and our administration. We appreciate the one-on-one dialogue earlier and you have the position paper from the Navajo Nation,” Vice President Nez said.

He said the approval of the Utah-Navajo Nation Reserved Water Rights Settlement is the top priority for the Begaye-Nez administration.

“With your help, I think we could really educate the leadership in D.C. on the tremendous need to address our water rights. That’s water rights for Navajo, as well as the state of Utah,” Vice President Nez said. “This combined effort through one settlement has been done in collaboration between both of our governments to move forward.”

The effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act was another issue for the Navajo Nation, especially with regard to the Indian Health Care Improvement Act component.

“If the Affordable Care Act is repealed, would it mean that the funding and support given to tribes through treaty obligations would cease? If there is going to be a replacement, then it should include the Indian Health Care Improvement Act,” Vice President Nez said.

The educational system at San Juan County School District was another area of concern the vice president touched upon, especially the low testing scores.

“I appreciate the bill that was introduced to fund more educational opportunities for tribal communities. The infusion of more dollars will help empower our students and retain some of the teachers and administrators,” Vice President Nez said.

He noted that retention of teachers and administrators is a challenge because of

the rural conditions of tribal communities.

“For Bears Ears, it was disheartening to hear this morning that House Concurrent Resolution 11 was passed. I know you mentioned that tribal leaders will have an opportunity to sit back down at the table with you on this issue,” Vice President Nez said.

He introduced James Adakai, Oljato Chapter President and Bears Ears Commissioner for the Navajo Nation, informing the governor that Adakai was given authority by President Begaye to handle responsibilities and decisions on the Bears Ears National Monument Commission.

Before concluding, Vice President Nez spoke on the need to support the Indian Child Welfare Act and ensure that Navajo foster children were given custody to Navajo families.

“If we uphold our language, culture and tradition as important for tribes, then we need to honor the ICWA. We believe that our native children should be placed with their own tribe,” he said.

Other tribal leaders in attendance included Chairwoman Corrina Bow of the Paiute Band of Utah, Chairwoman Candace Bear of the Skull Valley Band of Goshutes, President Charlene Yellowhair of the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, Chairman Shane Warner of the Northwest Band of Shoshone Nation, Chairman Shaun Chaposse of the Ute Indian Tribe, and Chairman Virgil Johnson of the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation.



Vice President Nez takes copious notes during the presentation by Gov. Herbert for the public meeting portion of the 2017 American Indian Caucus Day.



Left to right, Chairwoman Charlene Yellowhair of the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, Chairwoman Candace Bear of the Skull Valley Band of Goshutes, and Chairwoman Corrina Bow of the Paiute Band of Utah.



The Utah State Office Building Auditorium was filled to capacity for caucus day. More than half of the attendees were Navajo.