



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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President Nez urges Congress to endorse Navajo Utah water bill to bring water to Navajo communities

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez called on lawmakers today to enact into law the bipartisan H.R. 644, the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act, during testimony before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife.

“I come before you today to ask for this body’s approval of a settlement that will provide Navajo people in Utah with the basic human right of access to clean water,” President Nez said.

In his testimony, President Nez conveyed his gratitude to bill sponsor Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT), Utah Gov. Gary R. Herbert, Lt. Governor Spencer J. Cox, and the co-sponsors of the bill for their support and leadership in ensuring that the Navajo people in southeastern Utah have the essential, modern convenience of running water.



PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez testifies in support of H.R. 644 before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife in Washington, D.C., on June 26, 2019.

President Nez said the challenges of providing access to water on the Navajo Reservation are “monumental and the conditions are dire.”

More than 40-percent of Navajo households in Utah lack running water or adequate sanitation in their homes. In some cases, such as in the community of Oljato on the Arizona-Utah border, a single spigot on a desolate road, miles from any residence, serves 900 people.

The legislation seeks to solidify water rights in this landmark settlement between the Navajo Nation, the United States, and the State of Utah. The settlement sets a quantity of water aside for the Navajo Utah communities and provides critical funding for water infrastructure for Navajo Utah communities.

The legislation authorizes the appropriation of approximately \$210 million for a Trust Fund that will be conveyed to the Navajo Nation, with \$198,300,000 dedicated to planning, design, and construction and \$11,100,000 devoted to operations and management.

Also, the State of Utah will contribute \$8 million for planning, design, and construction purposes. The legislation also authorizes the appropriation of \$1 million for the hydrographic surveys to complete the quantification of the Navajo Nation's water rights.

"The passage of this legislation will advance the commitments made in the Treaty of 1868, where Navajo leaders pledged their honor to keep peace with the United States and, in return, the United States pledged to the Navajo People a permanent homeland. In the arid West, no lands can be a permanent homeland without an adequate supply of water, especially potable water," President Nez said.

President Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer also extend their appreciation to U.S. Sen. Mitt Romney for sponsoring the settlement bill in the Senate and respectfully request bipartisan support from Senate members.

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PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Congressman Rob Bishop (R-UT) in Washington, D.C., on June 26, 2019.