



The Navajo Nation
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Bill to protect Chaco Canyon advances through the House



PHOTO: An ancient structure in Chaco Canyon in the state of New Mexico on May 28, 2019.

WINDOW ROCK — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer commend the U.S. House for passing H.R. 2181, the “Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act of 2019” sponsored by Assistant Speaker Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.) and co-sponsored by Congresswoman Deb Haaland (D-N.M.) on Wednesday. The bill aims to permanently ban oil and gas drilling on federal lands in the greater Chaco Canyon region.

“Thank you to the members of the U.S. House for supporting the Navajo Nation and helping to preserve this sacred area for our future generations,” stated President Nez.

In June, Assistant Speaker Luján was also able to successfully secure an amendment in the House of Representatives for a one-year ban on oil and gas drilling for the Chaco area, which also requires approval from the Senate.

Earlier this year in meetings with House and Senate members and with the U.S. Department of the Interior, President Nez and Vice President Lizer also shared their concern for potential health impacts on local residents due to oil and gas drilling.

“Today’s vote is a significant step forward, but we remain steadfast in our support for passage by the full Senate and eventually President Trump,” Vice President Lizer stated.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer also thank Congresswomen Deb Haaland (D-N.M.) Xochitl Torres Small (D-N.M.) and U.S. Sens. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) for sponsoring the House and Senate bills and for supporting the Navajo Nation.

Assistant Speaker Luján expressed his appreciation to tribal leaders and his congressional colleagues and stated that he is encouraged by the action of the House.

“The House passage of the *Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act* is a major victory for New Mexico and significant progress toward establishing permanent protections for Chaco Canyon. For at least a decade, drilling and extraction have threatened the sacred, ancestral homelands of the greater Chaco region, putting this treasured landscape at risk of desecration,” said Congressman Luján. “I’m extremely proud to have worked alongside the New Mexico Delegation, Tribal leaders, and every day New Mexicans who fought tirelessly for this progress. It’s time for the Senate to protect Chaco so that future generations inherit their spiritual homelands intact.”

“Chaco Canyon is a sacred place that future generations should be able to experience and learn from, but we’ve seen time and again how extractive industries threaten special places like Chaco. I’m incredibly blessed to work with colleagues who recognize the value of Chaco Canyon and has worked so hard to pass a bill that will protect Chaco, so that the future generations of Pueblo people will have access to the place where our ancestors are buried, and New Mexicans will be able to take pride in having this pristine site in our state for years to come,” said Rep. Haaland.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer look forward to advocating for the bill as it moves on to the full Senate.

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