



The Navajo Nation
Yideeskáadi Nitsáhákees

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Navajo President Buu Nygren, Speaker Crystalyne Curley, AG Ethel Branch take questions about historic water rights settlement legislation

Bipartisan bill introduced in Senate, House by Arizona delegation

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren took questions from the press Tuesday just hours before he boarded a flight to Washington to lobby for the country's largest Indian water rights settlement.

On Monday, U.S. Senators Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.), Kyrsten Sinema (I-Ariz.), Congressmen Juan Ciscomani (R-Ariz.), Greg Stanton (D-Ariz.), David Schweikert (R-Ariz.)

and Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) introduced bipartisan legislation in support of the Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act.

The historic settlement was approved unanimously in May by the Navajo Nation Council, the Hopi Tribal Council and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribal Council.

If authorized by Congress, the settlement legislation will settle water rights to the Colorado River, Little Colorado River, groundwater of the Navajo and Coconino aquifers beneath the Navajo Nation, provide reservation land to the San Juan Southern Paiutes, and provide funding for

infrastructure to deliver water to families who have none.

"We've got thousands and thousands of Americans in Arizona without running water," President Nygren told

Navajo and regional reporters during a virtual press conference.

Also speaking was Navajo Nation Speaker Crystalyne Curley and Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch.



"It's about time we get some water and infrastructure to Arizona citizens and U.S. citizens," he said. "It's just due, especially with climate changes that we talked with them about when we go up to Congress."

Asked about the current Washington political climate with the need to get a \$5 billion water rights bill passed, President Nygren said there was no time to waste before the national election.

"We're very ambitious," he said. "The current president is very supportive. He's been very supportive of Arizona, very supportive Navajo and the Native American tribes.

By having it introduced by a House Republican and a Democratic senator, I think that we've got the bipartisan support from the beginning."

Attorney General Branch said the introduction of the legislation was in time to participate in a July 23 House Natural Resources Committee hearing.

"There are, essentially, things that must happen for the legislation to move forward," she said. "We will have to have hearings in the House and the Senate, so we're in the queue. We're well positioned to be part of that House Natural Resources Committee hearing thanks to Senator Kelly and Representative Ciscomani and their staff, as well as their co-sponsors."

She said the three tribes and other parties to the settlement are looking for a vote before the end of the year.

"We want to make sure that everyone that is in place now has an opportunity to vote on this legislation," she said. "It's quite complex and we want to make sure that everyone is up to speed and we don't lose any time and, of course, we lock in these rights as soon as possible."

Speaker Curley acknowledged that the legislation faces a tight timeframe.

"It's going to be really fast-paced movement," she said. "We have to set this as a priority because our 110 communities provided a lot of feedback, a lot of personal testimonies from all constituents for this legislation to go forward."

She said Navajo leadership will try to mobilize dedication, commitment and support from all tribal leadership and state partners.

"There will be challenges, just being the biggest water rights settlements in history," she said. "But we also have to put our voice louder and tell our stories from our grandparents, our ancestors of how long this fight has taken, reiterating that there's still many of our families that haul water. There's still many of our families that that can't even turn on a faucet."

Of significance to President Nygren, the speaker and attorney general is how quickly the settlement negotiations moved to completion.

"What we care about is water. That's a non-partisan issue. It's trying to make sure that the first Americans – Navajo, Hopi, Southern Paiute– continue to tell that story."

– Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren

"That within itself was very historic," the President said. "What we care about is water because that's a non-partisan issue. It's really trying to make sure that the first Americans – Navajo, the Hopi, the Southern Paiute – continue to tell that story."

Asked why other tribes or Congressional representatives from other states should care about three tribes in the Southwest receiving a water rights settlement, Attorney General Branch said people from around the country responded during COVID to the needs of the Navajo people who don't have water.

"This is a basic human right to have access to clean drinking water," she said. "We're all Americans. When it comes to folks in Florida or South Carolina, I think people just don't realize that there's this huge equity gap, that some of our first peoples on this continent, in this country, still don't have equal access to clean drinking water in their homes."

She said there have been 35 water rights settlements that have gone through Congress but very few of them were about getting water to people.

"At the Navajo Nation, the primary purpose is to get water to people, to get drinking water to actual living, breathing people. We're talking about 110,000 Navajo people in Arizona. We're not talking about huge agricultural projects.

"We're not talking about securing water rights to be able to lease and gain lease revenue. We're talking about getting water to grandmas... to children, and to give those people an equal opportunity to life and health and welfare in our Arizona community. I think that is compelling."