



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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25th Navajo Nation Council advocates for Navajo legislative priorities in Utah



Left to right: Utah Attorney General Derek Brown met with Council Delegates Shaandiin Parrish, Brenda Jesus, and Casey Allen Johnson to discuss Navajo legislative priorities in Utah.

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah – On Thursday, members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council met with Utah state representatives and senators to advocate for key Navajo Nation priorities, including road infrastructure, voting rights, and protections for American Indian children.

The Utah State legislative session began on Tuesday, January 21. On February 6, the Utah Division of Indian Affairs hosted American Indian Day on the Hill, facilitating important dialogue between the state's Native American tribes and legislators. Council delegates Shaandiin Parrish, Brenda Jesus, and Casey Allen Johnson attended the day's events.

During a meeting with Representative Kay Christofferson, Budget and Finance Committee Chair Shaandiin Parrish emphasized the need for further collaboration with the state to extend the Navajo Mountain Road, which would improve public safety, emergency response times, and stimulate tourism and economic development in southeastern Utah.

The Navajo Nation is seeking an additional \$1 million to complete the \$4 million environmental impact study for the Navajo Mountain Road extension. With much of the funding already secured, the Nation is eager to partner with Utah to bring this project to fruition.

“The Navajo Mountain Road is a long-standing priority for the Navajo Nation. It would reduce the commute from over three hours to just thirty minutes for travel between Oljato and Blanding,” said Chair Parrish. “While we are exploring funding options for this road, we are also eager to partner with the state, as this project will benefit both sovereign nations.”

The high cost of road projects on the Navajo Nation remains a challenge due to the need to transport materials such as asphalt and gravel from outside the area, rather than utilizing local gravel pits.

“We are working with federal leaders to deregulate mineral rights on trust land, allowing the Nation to access and use gravel located on our land,” said Resources and Development Committee Chair Brenda Jesus. “This will lower costs. We need to cut through layers of bureaucracy and advocate for a more streamlined process.”

In a discussion with Rep. Jefferson Moss, Chair Jesus voiced the Navajo Nation’s opposition to House Bill 300, which proposes amendments to Utah election law requiring voters to return ballots in person and present valid voter identification.

“Many of our tribal members live in rural areas without street addresses, which presents challenges for obtaining valid identification. Our elders also face literacy barriers and often need translations of proposed bills,” Chair Jesus said. “As this bill progresses, we must ensure it includes amendments that address the needs of rural constituents and elders.”

The delegates also met with Utah Attorney General Derek Brown to advocate for House Bill 30, the Indian Family Preservation Act Amendments. This bill seeks to address jurisdiction over child custody proceedings and the placement of Indian children into Indian homes.

“In the Navajo Nation, which spans across Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, Utah is the only state where children are not afforded Indian Child Welfare Act protections. HB30 presents an opportunity for Utah lawmakers to take a stand and demonstrate their commitment to protecting Native American children,” said Chair Parrish.

Chair Jesus underscored the importance of HB30 for preserving culture and language, as tribal nations look to their youth to carry on these vital traditions.

“We don’t want our children taken away from the Navajo Nation and placed in foster homes outside of our community. We believe in the importance of keeping our families intact, whether that means children staying with their aunts, uncles, or sometimes even grandparents,” said Chair Jesus.

Council Delegate Casey Allen Johnson acknowledged that while the Navajo Nation has faced challenges in securing state funding for the Navajo Mountain Road Environmental Impact Statement, the Nation continues to engage with legislators to find common ground and advance priorities that benefit both tribal members and the broader Utah community.

“Beyond tourism and emergency response, the Navajo Mountain Road will also enhance election security. The current detour from Oljato to Blanding forces ballots cast in Utah to travel

a three-hour detour through Arizona before reaching polling stations in time to be counted," Delegate Johnson explained.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council expresses gratitude to the Utah state representatives and senators who met with the delegates, as their continued support is essential to advancing priorities that will improve the quality of life for tribal members.

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