



Presentation to the Indian Affairs Committee

Presented by: Pete Ken Atcitty, Chief of Staff

for

**LoRenzo Bates, Speaker
23rd Navajo Nation Council**

September 8, 2017

Introduction

On behalf of Speaker LoRenzo Bates of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council, I would like to express my sincere appreciation in allowing representation from Legislative Branch to provide an update on issues from the Navajo Nation. First, Speaker Bates sends his deepest regrets for not attending today due to other commitments. However, he continues to advocate for the Navajo Nation to ensure the Navajo Nation is protected for future generations.

I believe a brief overview of the Navajo Nation and our government structure is appropriate information as I report the agenda item on the State Tribal Collaboration Act and the Annual Summit.

Overview of the Navajo Nation

The Navajo Nation includes 27,425 square-miles of land that extends into New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah, and borders Colorado, which makes the Navajo Nation the largest geographic land base American Indian reservation in the United States.

According to the data from the 2010 U.S. Census, the Navajo population exceeds 332,000, 47-percent of which live on the reservation with the remaining living elsewhere.

Government Structure

Currently, the Navajo Nation operates under a three-branch government consisting of an Executive Branch, Legislative Branch, and a Judicial Branch.

Executive Branch

The role of the Navajo Nation President and Vice President has evolved over the years. The executive branch in its current form represents the Navajo Nation and implements the policies and laws enacted by the Legislative Branch. Many of the Navajo Nation divisions, departments, offices and programs established by law are operated under the executive branch.

Legislative Branch

The legislative branch is the Governing Body of the Navajo Nation that is responsible for enacting legislations to determine the future of the Navajo People. The legislative body is comprised of 24 council delegates who represent 110 chapters within five agencies (Northern, Eastern, Western, Central, and Ft. Defiance). The Navajo Nation Code serves as the foundation of the Navajo Nation government,

which encompasses laws that were established to provide Navajo leaders with guiding principles in the administration of policies, and plans and self-governance.

Judicial Branch

The judicial branch serves a vital role in upholding the values and principles of Navajo laws. Responsibilities of the branch include peacemaking, obedience, discipline, punishment, interpreting laws, and rendering decisions and judgments. Throughout the Nation, there are seven judicial districts. Tribal courts assume responsibility for criminal and civil matters within the Navajo Nation territorial jurisdiction.

Under the three-branch government structure, each separate branch has its defined duties and hierarchy. While the Executive Branch oversees many of the Navajo Nation divisions, departments, offices and programs established by law, the Legislative Branch enacts these laws. Since the Navajo Legislative Branch enacts the laws, we feel that the Navajo Legislative Branch should be recognized as a vital part of State Tribal Collaboration Act and therefore should be included, along with the President, as a Leader of the Navajo Nation at the Annual Summit.

State-Tribal Collaboration Act and the Annual Summit

Over the years, the Legislative Branch have been limited to one invitation to attend the Annual Summit hosted by the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department. This has been a great concern. As I mentioned above, the legislative body is comprised of 24 council delegates who represent 110 chapters within five agencies (Northern, Eastern, Western, Central, and Ft. Defiance) throughout the Navajo Reservation. This includes 3 states, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. However, 12 council delegates out of the 24 members represent communities of New Mexico.

The members of the council have direct contact with their constituents at the community level. Delegates have the most understanding of community concerns and would be of great benefit to share their concerns with New Mexico Indian Affairs Department.

Tribal Infrastructure Funding (TIF)

A copy of the current TIF spreadsheet is attached.

Other Issues on the Navajo Nation

Over the past few months, the residents of the Navajo Nation within New Mexico have expressed concerns they have been experiencing with New Mexico Motor Vehicle Departments (MVD) in providing documents for proof of physical addresses and birth certificates. Recently, members of the Navajo Nation Council met with representatives from New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department to address these issues. A copy of a Press Release provided by Office of the Speaker is attached.

Moving forward, I look forward to any future discussions as we strengthen our government-to-government relationship. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact me at Office of the Speaker at (928) 871-7160 or via email at petekenatcity@navajo-nsn.gov