



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation Council meets with Arizona Congressman Tom O'Halleran to discuss infrastructure projects, Bennett Freeze, and abandoned uranium mines

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council hosted a meeting with United States Representative Tom O'Halleran (D-AZ) in the Council Chambers. Topics of discussion focused on the federal clean-up of abandoned uranium mines, support for infrastructure projects in the former Bennett Freeze area, protection of voting rights, and requests for a Congressional field hearing for allottee families impacted in the Chaco Canyon area.

Chairman Rickie Nez, Vice Chair Otto Tso, Council Delegate Thomas Walker Jr., Delegate Herman Daniels Jr., Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr., and Delegate Wilson Stewart Jr. were in attendance for the roundtable meeting.

"We thank Congressman O'Halleran for his leadership on behalf of the Navajo people and for pushing forward the \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill in Congress. There are over 500 open uranium mines that were abandoned by the federal government, many located in the communities I represent. Our families are suffering from the poison uranium has brought to our land and this must be cleaned up immediately. For over 40 years now, the Bennett Freeze area has halted construction of new infrastructure projects, adversely impacted our local economy, and put many families in shack houses. The federal government has a trust obligation to invest millions of dollars into the Bennett Freeze region and to help us rebuild communities," said Thomas Walker Jr. (Birdsprings, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Coalmine Canyon, Cameron).

Last year, Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. sponsored Resolution No. CO-60-21 that requests for a United States congressional hearing to be conducted within the Navajo Nation on the long-term effects of uranium on the health of the Navajo people. For over 10 years, Delegate Walker has been advocating for the families affected by uranium exposure, passage of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), and for millions in new federal funds to be invested into the Bennett Freeze area.

"The Navajo Nation has the economic potential to be a leader in helium and hydrogen development in the southwest. We need to position Arizona and the Four Corners region as a hub for clean hydrogen that will create good-paying jobs during this pandemic. The Resources and Development Committee requested Congressman O'Halleran to advocate for helium on the critical minerals list by the U.S. Geological Survey and that federal agencies must engage in proper tribal consultation over matters that impact Sovereign Nations. The process to develop helium is safe and another revenue generating initiative that will help the Navajo people," said Chairman Rickie Nez (T'iistsoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tsé Daa K'aan, Newcomb, San Juan).

Earlier this month, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) hosted meetings in Washington D.C. engaging federal agencies that included a commitment by the U.S. Department of Energy to engage in tribal consultation with the Navajo Nation on future hydrogen hubs. Recently, letters of support were

sent to New Mexico lawmakers from Speaker Seth Damon, Resources and Development Committee Chairman Rickie Nez, and Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez supporting the designation of the Four Corners area as part of the new U.S. hydrogen economy.

“Over \$2 billion in ARPA funds will be allocated for Navajo water, electric, broadband, and road infrastructure projects that I believe will help us rebuild the communities in the Western Agency. We appreciate Congressman O’Halloran for working closely with chapter officials and community leaders on our local priorities. Annually, the Navajo Nation loses around \$50 million in revenue because of the Kayenta Mine closure and the shutdown of the Navajo Generating Station. This caused a major economic impact on small businesses and displaced our families who depended on good paying jobs in the region. Climate change is affecting us as we hit another drought year, our livestock are suffering, and access to clean water is a future problem. We need to find alternative ways to generate new revenue while we protect our sacred Mother Earth for future generations,” added Council Delegate Herman Daniels Jr. (Ts’ah Bii’ Kin, Navajo Mountain, Shonto, Oljato).

During the Winter Session, the Navajo Nation Council passed Emergency Resolution No. CJA-14-22 affirming support for the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021 and the protection of voting rights of the Navajo people for all state and federal elections. This resolution authorizes the Navajo government and its representatives to advocate for this official position to Congress and the White House.

“Our Native American people must have equal opportunity to fairly participate in elections. Precinct voting boundaries need to be clearly defined so there are no questions on where our Navajo people cast their ballots on Election Day. We have been working closely with the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission to protect the voting rights of our Tribal Nations in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act ensures everyone has equal access to the ballot when choosing their leaders. The Navajo people continue to face barriers to voting, like longer travel to polling stations, unpaved roadways, voting materials printed in English, and the lack of access to the U.S. Post Offices to deliver their mail-in or absentee ballots. Voting is a human right that should never be obstructed or denied in any democracy,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain).

Representative Tom O’Halloran shared his support for a field hearing on uranium mines and his commitment to rebuild communities affected in the Bennett Freeze area. He added, “The Navajo people have given so much to protect this country and it is the responsibility of the federal government to act now. We have advocated for the health care needs of families in northern Arizona that has led to the construction of the new Indian Health Service hospital in Dilkon. It is also my plan to bring Environmental Protection Agency Administrator, Michael Regan, to the Cameron Chapter to visit the abandoned uranium sites. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law invests \$3.5 billion in cleaning up Superfund sites across the county, making it one of the largest investments to address legacy pollution for Indian Country. The proper consultation of Tribal Nations with the United States is important as we work together, government-to-government, to uplift the Navajo Nation during this pandemic.”

Congressman O’Halloran represents the largest congressional district in Arizona located in the northern portion of the state since 2017. He is a member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, and the Committee for Agriculture.

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