



Navajo Leadership Meets with Utah Governor Spencer J. Cox

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PHOTO: Navajo leadership sit with Utah Gov. Spencer J. Cox and Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson to discuss various issues with Navajo communities in Utah.

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council met with Utah Governor Spencer Cox last week at the Utah State Capitol. Also in attendance via telecommunications was Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez. Gov. Cox listened to the issues brought forth by Navajo leadership for the Navajo communities located in Utah.

The topics of discussion were related to Navajo Utah water rights, state and tribal public safety, infrastructure, Navajo language in educational institutions, regional tourism, economic development and the Bears Ears National Monument (BENM).

Navajo leadership requested support and assistance from Gov. Cox to develop the infrastructure for the West Water communities. Securing clearances for right-of-way projects is a concern in order to deliver water and electricity to the Navajo Utah communities.

Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown addressed the need for an increase in availability of the Navajo Language in Utah's school system. Delegate Brown would like to work with the Utah State Board of Education to allow students to receive language credit for Navajo language programs.

“What are we going to leave for our people, for generations who have yet to come? On average, every two weeks an Indigenous language dies because the knowledge holders and speakers pass on,” said Delegate Brown (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chííłchinbii'tó). “It takes two generations of non-native speakers to lose the language. It is our job to create immersion schools and language nests.”

Leadership also thanked Gov. Cox for his strong and continued support for the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act (NUWRSA). The NUWRSA gives the Navajo Nation the right to deplete 81,500 acre-feet of water per year from Utah's Colorado River Basin apportionment. The act also authorizes approximately \$220 million for water infrastructure to provide clean drinking water to Navajo communities in Utah.

Navajo leadership and Gov. Cox jumped at the idea of increasing economic development for both Utah and the Navajo Nation through tourism. With the infrastructure in place, an economic hub could be created thanks to the NUWRSA.

"People want what you have to offer, people come from all over the world, they want to see what you have," said Gov. Cox. "We absolutely should begin in the way that we need tourism so we can give them that experience and move them from the Mighty 5 to the reservation and back and forth. We can keep them here for two weeks instead of one."

The last topic discussed was on Bears Ears National Monument's restoration recommendation by Interior Secretary Deb Haaland. Navajo leadership requested the support from Gov. Cox to preserve and protect the ancestral homelands of the Navajo People within the BENM.

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