

President Nez discusses ARPA priorities with Congressman O'Halleran

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 25 February 2022 07:55



TSE BONITO, N.M. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Nez-Lizer Administration cabinet members met with U.S. Rep. Tom O'Halleran, D-AZ, at the Navajo Division of Transportation in Tse Bonito, N.M., to discuss priorities related to the implementation of American Rescue Plan Act funding to help mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting was held at the Navajo Nation Fiscal Recovery Fund Office, overseen by interim Executive Director Tom Platero, which serves as a clearinghouse for ARPA related activities. Platero informed the Congressman that the Fiscal Recovery Fund Office has hired four employees and is preparing to hire more to help implement mechanisms to generate financial reports and the overall progress of the American Rescue Plan Act funds.

“Congressman O'Halleran is a strong advocate for the Navajo people. He played a major role in securing ARPA funds and funding through the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Law for the Navajo Nation,” Nez said. “We appreciate his visit to the Fiscal Recovery Fund Office to learn more about the progress that Director Platero and his team are making. We approved \$557 million for direct hardship relief for our Navajo people and now we need funding approved for infrastructure development that will have long lasting benefits for our communities and future generations.”

During the State of the Navajo Nation Address on Jan. 24, President Nez called on the Navajo Nation Council to expedite the approval of ARPA funds for infrastructure development related to water, electrical, broadband, and housing, which are included in Legislation No. 0257-21.

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"It was an honor to meet with President Nez and his Division Directors to discuss the transparency and accountability measures that the Navajo Nation is working on in implementing the American Rescue Plan Act, and the work they are doing to identify projects that will provide long-term benefits for the Navajo people. I appreciate the ongoing efforts to mitigate the pandemic and collaboration to help save more lives," O'Halleran said.

Several Division Directors also provided updates on projects and their work to implement federal funding to help Navajo families during the pandemic. The Office of the President and Vice President has hosted multiple town halls online and local radio to inform the public of support that is available for rental assistance, utility costs, burial assistance, and other resources.

Navajo Nation Division of Social Services Director Deannah Neswood-Gishey highlighted the ongoing work to administer the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program to assist Navajo households with water and wastewater costs. Through LIHWAP, the Navajo Family Assistance Services program may assist eligible households to restore water services that were disconnected or prevent disconnection for households at risk of disconnection.

"Nearly nine months have passed since the Navajo Nation received the first allocation of ARPA funding from the federal government," Nez said. "CARES Act Hardship Assistance has been delivered to our elders and ARPA Hardship Assistance relief will be going out to our people this month. We have to get the remaining ARPA funds allocated and approved so that we begin construction and full implementation of infrastructure improvements."

Other Division Directors in attendance included Navajo Hopi Land Commission Office Director Robert Black, Department of Health Director Dr. Jill Jim, Division of Transportation Director Garret Silversmith, Navajo Veterans Administration Director James Zwierlein, Division of Public Safety Director Jesse Delmar, and Telecommunications Regulatory Commission Office Director Christopher Becenti.

More information about the Navajo Nation Fiscal Recovery Fund Office is available on their website at: <http://www.frf.navajo-nsn.gov/>.

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