



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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**State Task Force meets with N.M.
Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham at the Roundhouse**



PHOTO: New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham met with the State Task Force of the 24th Navajo Nation Council Feb. 7 at the Roundhouse. She said the state will continue strengthening relations with the Council for projects benefitting Navajo chapters.

SANTA FE — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council met with N.M. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham Feb. 7 during American Indian Day at the Roundhouse. The discussions focused on Navajo Nation priorities related to the Tribal Infrastructure Fund and Capital Outlay funding for projects on the N.M. portion of the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Mark Freeland is the Chairman of the State Taskforce for the Naabik'iyáti' Committee and led discussions with the governor. He said the task force wanted to discuss the priorities, including the resolution that was passed by Council Jan. 23. "Our capital outlay projects are moving along," he said. Gov. Lujan Grisham said the capital outlay reform has been fantastic. "I get upset when the Department of Indian Affairs is not making an impact for you, getting money expended and delivered to the communities it was intended for," she said.

Delegate Freeland said the Navajo delegation was recognized on the senate floor by Sen. Clemente Sanchez (D-Dist. 30), who reminded his colleagues about life on the Navajo Nation and struggles the people are enduring. "That was testimony that our people are still without electricity, without running water, bathrooms, and commodes. It was one of those moments where we were reminded as delegates as well," he said.

Chairman Rickie Nez spoke about the need to support the water rights settlement with Navajo. He said the Gallup-Navajo Water Supply Project was moving along and that the Navajo Nation continues to work with the Bureau of Reclamation. “I believe the Navajo Nation and state of New Mexico can also have a renewable synergy as far as working with each other,” he said. Chairman Nez said the Navajo Nation supports the Energy Transition Act, especially the provisions to assist power plant employees with severance pay and job training.

“The ETA will really help a lot of Navajo workers (at San Juan Generating Station) with retraining. Navajo Generating Station has shut down, as well as Kayenta Mine. We met with Arizona Public Service and they said Cholla Power Plant will shut down one unit this year and by 2024, the whole plant will be shut down,” Chairman Nez said. He asked for the governor’s support for the Navajo Nation’s renewable energy effort. Additional support for school bus routes in San Juan County was also mentioned by Chairman Nez, who said chip sealing roads by partnering with the county has been successful.

Gov. Lujan Grisham said the state will continue to bolster partnerships with the Navajo Nation to get the laterals completed and continue renewable energy efforts. “You have to hold us accountable and we have to be partners because peoples’ livelihoods are affected. As for the ETA, let me be clear: there’s \$20 million for workers directly and \$20 million for San Juan County. We have to keep thinking of ways to make sure those families are whole and not having to worry about making a mortgage payment or putting food on the table,” she said. “I don’t want one Navajo family or worker to suffer from the shift of one industry to another.”

Council Delegate Wilson Stewart advocated for replacing aging infrastructure and the need for multipurpose buildings that serve the community. “Our buildings and infrastructure are so old. They were constructed many years back and people are still congregating in spaces with wood burning stoves. That’s not healthy,” he said. “Any time we have an emergency, these chapter houses are where the people go. Combining Head Start and senior citizen centers at these multipurpose buildings will truly serve the communities with a one-stop shop.”

Delegate Stewart also spoke of the need to protect sacred sites on the Navajo Nation. He noted that Chaco Canyon has been the center of sacred site discussions, but that Navajo has different areas located across Navajo. “These sites were only expressed by medicine men who know where those locations are. Some of these petroglyphs are on ranches and the still go out there to make offerings. This is something we need to put together for sacred sites, not just Chaco,” he said.

Chairwoman Eugenia Charles-Newton spoke on behalf of the chapters and said they should get consideration for funding because they are the local voices that elected public servants into office. “We’re asking that you make chapter funding a priority. That’s where the local grassroots people are and they’re the ones who know what their communities need,” she said, noting that funding the proposals submitted by the tribal president’s office would only take away from the people at the local level.

Chairwoman Charles-Newton said cross-commissioning is another important area that needs the support of the governor. “A lot of our cross-commissioning agreements need to be renewed. Sitting down at the table with the sheriffs has been challenging.” Gov. Lujan Grisham said she will work to ensure the cross-commissioning agreements are done. Chairwoman Charles-Newton also advocated for the Shiprock Judicial Complex, thanking Gov. Lujan Grisham for the \$3.5 million provided by the state last year. “I’m hoping that you’ll match that amount again this year. We’re at \$66 million right now for that project and we’re still working toward completing it,” she said.

Council Delegate Amber Crotty advocated on behalf of Navajo elders. She noted that multipurpose centers wouldn't work at all locations and that elders in her chapters had basic needs such as food, water and hygiene. "We need to return the humanity back to our elders. They are our foundation and sometimes, they feel neglected. There's an uptick in violence upon elders. How can they be protected?" she asked. Delegate Crotty also spoke about human trafficking and the need to prevent exploitation of Navajo men and women. "We need to keep the politics out of it. Half of the Navajos missing are from urban areas," she said.

Council Delegate Charlaine Tso agreed and said she is working with her chapters on this issue. She noted that the human trafficking is often also linked to drug trafficking as well. "We get reports of aircraft landing at certain times of the day. We need to get drugs off of our land," she said. The governor said the state will continue to work with the tribes to address the missing and murdered Indigenous men and women.

Chairman Daniel Tso spoke about the need for Impact Aid funding for schools in N.M. that serve Navajo students. "Education has the ability to move people out of poverty," he said, adding that the Yazzie v. Martinez case must be kept separate from Impact Aid. "Don't let the settlement funds be used as Impact Aid," he said.

Council Delegate Raymond Smith Jr. spoke about the need to support Navajo veterans. "I'm thankful for the New Mexico setting up veteran service officers across the state. A lot of veterans don't even know that they have benefits," he said. The VSOs need to travel to rural areas to provide services, he said, adding that Navajos have the most active duty military personnel currently serving per capita when compared to other tribes in the state.

Gov. Lujan Grisham said she will continue working with Navajo leadership on the priorities shared by the State Task Force. The 24th Navajo Nation Council will continue to advocate for projects benefitting chapters and the grassroots people in need of service. Council Delegate Pernel Halona presented the governor with a turquoise horned toad pin in appreciation for her support of the Tohatchi Fire Station. "My Cheii," she said beaming with appreciation.



PHOTO: Gov. Lujan Grisham said she has met with all of the Senate and House committee chairs, who told her: "This is the strongest cabinet in the history of the state of New Mexico."

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