23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation leadership meets with federal OMB officials regarding Navajo Indian Irrigation Project

WINDOW ROCK – Members of the Navajo Nation Council continued their efforts on Friday to push for the completion of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project for Navajo Agricultural Products Industry, as they met with federal officials with the Office of Management and Budget to discuss funding options.

Also in attendance was President Russell Begaye, Vice President Jonathan Nez, BIA Navajo Region director Sharon Pinto, NAPI CEO Wilton Charley, among other officials.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) noted that Council members have met with federal officials on several occasions to discuss the federal government's obligation to provide funding to complete the final three 10,000-acre blocks of the NIIP, in accordance with Public Law 87-483, which was passed by Congress in 1962. To date, Blocks 9, 10, and 11, each consisting of 10,000 acres of land, have not been completed to allow for additional farming development.

On Thursday, the OMB officials were provided a tour of the NAPI facilities to gain a firsthand perspective on the conditions and needs of the infrastructure and facilities. During the tour, NAPI officials informed OMB that the estimated cost to complete Block 9 is approximately $120 million.

The overall estimated need for operations and maintenance costs per year is $7 million, however the federal government has only funded NAPI approximately $4 million in recent years.

"I believe the consensus among the President's Office, Council, and others is to complete Block 9, but maintenance costs also need to be considered," stated Speaker Bates.

Speaker Bates added that operations and maintenance costs are an important factor to the continuation and growth of NAPI, while citing the breach in NAPI's water delivery system that occurred on May 13, which caused a major water shortage at the 80,000-acre farm and led to revenue losses for NAPI.

OMB officials informed those in attendance that the federal FY2017 budgets proposed by President Obama and the U.S. Senate include an increase of $1.5 million for operations and maintenance costs for NAPI. However, the U.S. House of Representatives has a budget that does not include the increase. No funding for Block 9 was included in any of the budgets.

The officials also noted that with a new administration taking office in January, it is uncertain what the top priorities would be and how that may influence the possibility of obtaining additional funding for NAPI.

BIA Navajo Region director Sharon Pinto explained that the process of obtaining additional funding is challenging and very competitive especially when the BIA and OMB have to consider budget requests from the 12 BIA regional offices that encompass many tribes.

OMB officials encouraged the Nation's leadership to continue collaborating to build a strong case for top federal officials to consider additional funding.

Speaker Bates and President Begaye said the Navajo Nation would continue to lobby and identify ways to increase funding for NAPI in order to grow and expand the enterprise.

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