

24th Navajo Nation Council explains how Infrastructure Act will benefit Tribal Nations

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Wash., D.C. — The 24th Navajo Nation Council is demonstrating its support for the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act signed into law by President Joe Biden at the White House Nov. 15. The act is a key part of the Biden Administration’s economic agenda during this pandemic.

The infrastructure bill will deliver \$550 billion in new federal investments across the country in the span of five years for bridges, roads, broadband connections, water, and new energy systems.

“By signing this infrastructure bill into law, President Biden has sent a clear message to Sovereign Nations around the country that we are a top priority,” Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh) said. “Two hundred fourteen million dollars will be used to bring running water to 40 percent of Navajo families because the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement is fully funded.

“Over \$11 billion in new infrastructure projects will be funded around Indian Country to begin construction on broadband internet lines, roadways, bridges, and water pipelines,” he said.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is the largest investment in Tribal Nation

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infrastructure projects. It includes:

\$3.5 billion for the Indian Health Service sanitation facilities construction

\$3 billion for the U.S. Department of Transportation tribal transportation program

\$2.5 billion to address previously approved Indian water rights settlements

\$55 billion for assistance grants for purposes of providing clean and safe drinking water to tribal communities

\$2 billion for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration for the tribal broadband connectivity program to expand broadband access

\$11.2 billion for grants for abandoned coal mine land and water reclamation projects

“For decades we have been advocating for the water rights of our Utah Navajo families and this law now provides full funding to begin connecting our water lines,” Delegate Charlaine Tso (Mexican Water, Tólikan, Teec Nos Pos, Aneth, Red Mesa) said. “Many of our Navajo homes will now have access to water, our main life source.

“It matters a lot to us that grandma and grandpa drink safe water, and our families in Utah can turn on the faucet for clean water,” Tso said.

According to the Interior Department, this law makes historic investments in Indigenous communities’ efforts to tackle the climate crisis.

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“Indigenous communities are facing unique climate-related challenges that pose existential threats to Tribal economies, infrastructure, livelihoods, and health,” Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said. “Coastal communities are facing flooding, erosion, permafrost subsidence, sea level rise, and storm surges, while inland communities are facing worsening drought and extreme heat.

“The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal’s historic investments in Tribal communities will help bolster community resilience, replace aging infrastructure, and provide support needed for climate-related relocation and adaptation,” she pointed out.

The law includes a \$466 million investment for the Bureau of Indian Affairs for infrastructure projects and climate resilience initiatives to include:

\$250 million for construction, repair, improvement and maintenance of irrigation and power systems, safety of dams, water sanitation, and other facilities

\$216 million for climate resilience, adaptation and community relocation planning, design and implementation of projects which address the varying climate challenges facing tribes across the country

“Everyone knows we’re long overdue to make major investments in infrastructure, but nobody knows that better than Indian Country,” Biden said. “Tribal lands have been chronically underfunded for generations.

“And so I’m very proud to say that when I sign the bill, the single-largest investment in Tribal infrastructure ever is going to occur: more than \$13 billion in direct investments to Indian Country and tens of billions more in grants and future funding opportunities — funding for clean drinking water, high-speed Internet, roads and bridges, environmental cleanups, and so much more,” Biden said at the White House Tribal Nations Summit.

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