

Navajo Nation Council pushes priorities to Arizona Governor, legislators

Written by gallupsun
Tuesday, 16 January 2024 13:46

PHOENIX — Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council and Speaker Crystalyne Curley met with Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs, Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes, and Arizona legislators at the Arizona State Capitol during the 29th Annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day on to advocate on behalf of Navajo Nation priorities.

The Governor's Office on Tribal Relations, in coordination with representatives from the State's Tribal Nations, facilitated the Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day on Jan. 10.

“There is a lot at risk, but also a lot of opportunities for Arizona’s tribes and that’s why it’s so important that our voices are heard by state legislators, agencies, and the Governor,” Curley (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) said. “Many of the issues that we brought to the state capitol are challenges that the Navajo Nation and other tribes have faced for many years.”

The state of Arizona faces a major budget deficit that will require state legislators to make difficult decisions when it comes to funding programs such as the Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program, also known as the school voucher program that was originally intended to provide financial assistance to parents for charter, private or home schooling.

During discussions with state legislators, council members explained how this program does not benefit Navajo students on the reservation due to low numbers of charter and private schools. Navajo leadership expressed concerns over the growing cost of the program relative to needed investments in the state public education system on the Navajo Nation.

On Jan. 9, members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council also met with Hobbs regarding her plans to address fraudulent sober living homes. Hobbs said she plans to introduce a bill that will increase fines, standardize inspections, and address licensing requirements for sober living homes.

“Our legislative counsel are currently working on these bills,” Hobbs said. “In terms of the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, changes need to be made to close the loopholes in licensing.”

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Once the bill language is finalized, Hobbs said she will ask the Navajo Nation and other tribes to review the plan.

Council members also addressed longstanding problems caused by dual taxation, which hinders economic progress for the Navajo Nation and other tribal nations. Businesses on the Navajo Nation must pay both state and tribal taxes which adversely impacts economic growth.

Due to the closure of the Navajo Generating Station and Kayenta Mine, transaction privilege tax funding has also decreased for Diné College and Navajo Technical University.

Council Delegate Carl R. Slater (Tsaile/Wheatfields, Lukachukai, Round Rock, Tséch'izhí, Rock Point) offered several options to create tax parity and establish more economic competitiveness for businesses to set up shop on Navajo.

"There isn't enough TPT being generated. Our colleges like Diné College and Navajo Technical University are not getting as much funding," Slater said. "We want to create the conditions for success, diversify our tax base and see the nation to stand on its own feet."

In meeting with the Arizona House Speaker, Senate President, House Majority Whip, and House Minority Leader, Council Delegates spoke in support of funding for infrastructure projects, education initiatives, increased support for veterans, and protection of elder service programs.

"We had very productive meetings with Arizona leaders. The issues we brought to the table are issues that impact our communities daily," Curley said. "Our requests and recommendations were well received, and we will continue to follow up on a consistent basis throughout the legislative session. The 25th Navajo Nation Council thanks all the Arizona leaders and lawmakers who opened their doors to hear our requests and challenges."

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