



# 24<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council

## Office of the Speaker

---

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 15, 2019

### MEDIA CONTACT

Carl Slater, Director of Communications and Government Affairs  
Bronson Peshlakai, Sr. Public Information Officer  
(928) 318-4896  
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

## Navajo Nation Council Commends Introduction of Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – The Navajo Nation Council commends U.S. Senators Mitt Romney (R-UT), Martha McSally (R-AZ), and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) for introducing the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act Thursday. The act will resolve the Navajo Nation’s federally reserved water rights claims within the State of Utah with a negotiated settlement.

“On behalf of the Navajo Nation Council, I want to thank Senator Romney for his strong leadership on this issue,” stated Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh).

“Navajo families in Utah have lived for far too long with inadequate, and frankly unconscionable water infrastructure. This bill will provide Navajo Utah citizens the federal funding to begin remedying that situation and grant non-Navajo Utah governments clarity on how they can build out their future water infrastructure development,” said Speaker Damon in response to the introduction.

“For many years there has been a great deal of conflict about who has the right to water that flows through Utah and the Navajo Nation as part of Utah,” Sen. Romney said. “This conflict could have been resolved through a lengthy court process that would have cost millions of dollars and accomplished very little. Instead, we have come together to introduce legislation that will resolve this conflict by providing additional water for the Navajo Nation and for the people of Utah in a way that is good for everybody. At the same time it will provide needed infrastructure to the Navajo Nation for nearly half of the 5,000 citizens there that don’t have running water. I’m proud to be joined by Senators McSally and Sinema, and I hope the Senate will take this up and pass it without delay so that we can keep the longstanding promise by the federal government to the Navajo Nation in Utah.”

“The Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act settles a decades-long negotiation and provides certainty to the Navajo Nation’s water security. I’ll continue working across the aisle to ensure the federal government makes good on its promises to tribal nations,” said Sen. Sinema.

“This is a tremendous bipartisan accomplishment to bring much-needed certainty to the Navajo Nation’s water supply,” Sen. McSally said. “I look forward to working to pass this into law to expand economic opportunity and uphold the government’s commitment to the Navajo.”

The settlement act takes action on several matters. First, the act provides the Navajo Nation the right to deplete 81,500 acre-feet per year from Utah’s Colorado River Basin apportionment. Secondly, it authorizes \$210 million in federal funding and \$8 million in state funding to address the short-term and long-term water development needs of the Utah portion of the Navajo Nation.

In return, the Navajo Nation waives its water-related claims against the United States and the state of Utah.

“This is going to be a sigh of relief to my communities and constituents. It will provide funding for agricultural conservation and management, which will reduce shortages to Navajo farms in addition to funding municipal water infrastructure. Thank you to our leaders and advocates for helping us succeed in this long-standing mission,” stated Council Delegate Charlaine Tso (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tóíkan, Red Mesa).

At the beginning of February, Speaker Damon, President Jonathan Nez, and Vice President Myron Lizer, after discussing the settlement with elected state leadership in Salt Lake City, met with Senator Romney in Washington to request his sponsorship of the settlement bill.

On April 11, Speaker Damon and Vice President Lizer met with Sen. Romney in Washington to discuss the introduction of the bill and how to advance it through both chambers of Congress.

Originally, the act was introduced in the 115th Congress as S.664 on March 15, 2017 by now-retired Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT). U.S. Rep. Rob Bishop (R-Brigham City), who was Chairman of the natural Resources Committee at the time, introduced the House companion on September 28, 2018.

Lt. Governor of Utah Spencer Cox (R) and the-then President of the Navajo Nation Russell Begaye testified at a Senate Committee on Indian Affairs hearing on the water rights bill and strongly advocated for its passage.

On October 3, 2018, the committee approved the bill.

Sen. Romney and the Nation anticipate that with the overwhelming state and Navajo support of the settlement bill, it will be enacted in the 116th Congress.

###

For news on the latest legislative branch activities, please visit [www.navajonationcouncil.org](http://www.navajonationcouncil.org) or find us on Facebook and Twitter, keywords: Navajo Nation Council