

Business Committee Meets with Congressional Members

On May 5 and 6, 2023, Business Committee Councilman Christopher Tabbee participated in the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) Tribal Engagement and Active Members Issues Conference in Palm Springs, California. The Conference brings Tribal leaders together with Democratic members of Congress to discuss important issues in Indian country.

This year the Conference featured new Democratic Minority Leader Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY). Key leaders on Indian issues in Congress also attended including: Indian Affairs Subcommittee Ranking Member Theresa Leger Fernández (D-NM), Natural Resources Committee Members Mary Peltola (D-AK) and Melanie Stansbury (D-NM), Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA), DCCC Chairwoman Rep. Suzan DelBene (D-WA), and many more.



Councilman Tabbee Discusses Tribal Issues with Rep. Jeffries, Rep. Peltola, and Rep. Ruiz

The Conference focused on infrastructure funding, tribal provisions in the Farm Bill, and threats to tribal sovereignty from U.S. Supreme Court Decisions in the *Castro-Huerta* and *Brackeen* cases. Councilman Tabbee spoke to the group and individual members of Congress on how these issues impact the Ute Indian Tribe.

Rep. Ruiz asked the tribal leaders assembled about plans, strategies, and ideas for addressing the Supreme Court's decisions impacting tribal sovereignty. Councilman Tabbee led the discussion by highlighting the ongoing need for a Congressional fix to the *Castro-Huerta* decision. The decision reversed two centuries of federal Indian law to find that states have concurrent authority with the federal government to prosecute non-Indians for crimes committed against Indians within Indian country. Councilman Tabbee reiterated the need for a simple fix clarifying that state authority is preempted under the law.

The *Brackeen* case also threatens tribal sovereignty and the political status of tribes. In this case, the plaintiffs are challenging the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and its provisions that prioritize keeping Indian children within their tribal communities. This case challenges the political status of tribal governments found in the U.S. Constitution and over two hundred years of federal Indian law. Tribal leaders discussed the importance of this case and legislation already proposed by Members of Congress to ensure that ICWA protections continue.

During the infrastructure discussion, Councilman Tabbee also discussed the delays in building out broadband internet caused by review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Members of Congress are interested in getting broadband build out completed and were considering ways to address NEPA review.

Councilman Tabbee also addressed the need for the United States Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service to be able to transfer lands to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in trust for tribes and ensure that tribes get first right of refusal to obtain lands. A number of tribes in attendance agreed with these proposals and the group discussed strategies for including these provisions in the Farm Bill that is scheduled to pass later this year.