

Business Committee Meetings in Washington, D.C. to Defend Tribal Lands and Waters

On May 3 and 4, 2022, the Business Committee held meetings in Washington, D.C. on pressing issues regarding the Tribe's lands, waters and COVID-19 relief funding. The Business Committee met with the White House, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Congressional Offices.



Business Committee Members meet with White House Tribal Affairs Director PaaWee Riveria

On Capital Hill, the Business Committee met with Senate Offices to address attacks on the Tribe's Uintah and Ouray Reservation by Senator Mike Lee's proposed HOUSES Act. The HOUSES Act would allow states to purchase lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for housing developments. This would include lands within the Tribe's Reservation and result in a second wave of homesteading on Indian reservations.

The Tribe asked Senate Offices to oppose the HOUSE Act and to include an exemption for Indian reservations. Staff for Senator Chuck Schumer, Senator Jon Tester, Senator Martin Heinrich, and Senator John Hickenlooper all stated that they oppose the HOUSES Act. The Tribe also met with Republican and Democratic Senate Committee Staff to discuss the HOUSES Act and the need to exclude Indian reservations from the bill. Committee staff indicated that a number of concerns have been raised with the HOUSES Act.

The Business Committee also met with Senate Offices to oppose Senator Mitt Romney's proposal to pay for new COVID-19 relief efforts by taking tribal funding included in the American Rescue Plan Act that passed Congress more than one year ago. Senator Romney proposes taking \$887 million from the \$2 billion Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund. These are funds that the Department of Treasury was just about to distribute to local and tribal governments. Senator

Romney would also take funding from the State Small Business Credit Initiative which is available to help tribal small businesses recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the House of Representatives, the Business Committee met with Natural Resources Committee Chairman Raul Grijalva's staff to discuss restoration of tribal homelands and co-management of federally managed lands. The Uintah and Ouray Reservation has more lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and BLM than any other reservation in the United States. Chairman Grijalva is developing two bills, the "Advancing Tribal Parity on Public Lands Act" and the "Tribal Cultural Areas System Act" that would require the USFS and BLM to work closely with the Tribe in the management of these lands. Grijalva's bills recognize the taking of tribal lands by the federal government and seek to provide tribes with more authority over federally managed lands.

In addition to Congressional Meetings, the Business Committee met with the White House, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and EPA. At the White House and EPA, the Business Committee discussed working with the Administration on a government-to-government basis for scheduling and conducting air emission inspections on the Tribe's Reservation.

At the BOR, the Business Committee continued to press the Administration to appoint a member of the Tribe to serve on the Upper Colorado River Commission. The Commission is currently made up of one federal member and four state members. There are no tribal seats on the Commission. In 2018, the Ten Tribes Partnership for the Colorado River Basin passed a resolution supporting the Ute Indian Tribe's effort to secure a seat on the Commission. The Business Committee also discussed ways that the Commission could recognize and work in collaboration with the Tribe. The Business Committee asked that the Commission and BOR work with the Tribe on a government-to-government basis in the management of Colorado River Basin waters.

The Business Committee also asked that the BOR take action to restore tribal homelands that were used by BOR as campsites in the 1960s during construction of the Central Utah Project. These lands are no longer needed by BOR and should have been restored to trust status long ago. BOR committed to following up on the trust status of these lands with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and to develop an agenda for follow up meeting in Fort Duchesne.