



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 13, 2016

MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253

Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174

Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918

nmb.communications@gmail.com

Delegate Chee among officials to hear directly from Shiprock flood victims



PHOTO: Council Delegate Tom Chee speaks to families and residents of Shiprock who were impacted by flooding near Salt Creek Wash in Shiprock, N.M. on August 13, 2016.

SHIPROCK, N.M. – Over 100 people were in attendance on Saturday at the First Wash Assembly of God church in Shiprock, as Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) and other government officials met with the families that were directly impacted by floods due to heavy rain last week.

Delegate Chee presided over the five-hour meeting, which provided the opportunity for tribal, federal, and local officials to update the families on recovery efforts and also for the families to speak directly to leaders and officials regarding their personal accounts of the flooding and to voice their immediate needs. On Aug. 8, the Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management declared a state of emergency in response to the flooding.

Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, Brian Lee with U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Lujan's (D – N.M.) office, Shiprock Chapter president Duane "Chili" Yazzie, Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety

director Jesse Delmar, Norman Yazzie with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and officials with the Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management were also in attendance and provided updates to the families.

Delegate Chee introduced each of the 17 community members who spoke on Saturday, some of which he referred to as the “unsung heroes” for the immediate and selfless actions they took to alert and help relatives and neighbors when the flooding began on the night of Aug. 5, near the area known as Salt Creek Wash – located in the northern portion of Shiprock. Reports indicate that as many as 13 homes were damaged, three of which were demolished due to the flood.

“We have resiliency within our people,” said Delegate Chee. “We must capitalize on the resiliency and spirit of our Navajo people in times like this.”

Many of the residents reported that among the most immediate needs includes securing temporary housing, clearing debris, replacing damaged vehicles, recovering or replacing lost documents such as vital records, repairing fences and irrigation systems in farm plots, securing storage units to house personal property during recovery efforts, preventing possible health hazards, and providing basic necessities such as hygiene products, food, and clothing.

Resident Shirley Montoya, who said she has been unable to stay in her home due to severe damage to the floor of her entire home, reported that she has encountered difficulties in seeking temporary housing through Navajo Housing Authority due to the loss of personal documents in the flooding and urged officials to expedite the process of issuing temporary housing.

“We don’t want to have to wait for long periods of time for housing,” said Montoya. “Immediate response is a must.”

Heather Tsosie, who grew up in the area of Salt Creek Wash, said that beyond immediate housing needs there is also the need to redevelop the damaged areas by replacing homes that were destroyed, and repairing water lines, power lines, sewer systems, and other utility needs.

“It hurts me to see demolished homes in the community I grew up in. We want all Navajo Nation departments to work together and make sure all affected families are taken care of – we don’t want to be forgotten,” Tsosie said.

Shiprock Chapter President Duane “Chili” Yazzie and many of the residents thanked and praised 20 volunteer members of the Shiprock Chapter Emergency Response Team for their hard work in helping the impacted families from the time the flooding occurred. Many residents said the volunteers were the first to aid the families the night the flooding began, and continue to help the families each day since.

Chief of Staff for the Office of the Speaker, Pete Ken Atcitty, was also in attendance and noted that Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) visited the affected area and met with the families last Sunday, and assisted in coordinating communication and efforts to remove debris from roadways and to begin assessing damages to infrastructure and housing.

Vice President Jonathan Nez said that assessing and documenting the damages is essential to obtaining assistance through federal entities such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He also noted that the Navajo Nation might be eligible for reimbursements through FEMA if damages exceed a \$1 million threshold, in accordance with the federal Stafford Act.

Vice President Nez implored the residents to document all of their losses and to share those documents with the acting director for the Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management, Harland Cleveland, who has also been designated as the main point of contact for recovery efforts by the Office of the President and Vice President.

Brian Lee with U.S. Rep. Lujan's office noted that the Congressman and Delegate Chee toured the area and met with families on Tuesday, and added that their office has reached out to numerous federal entities including FEMA, IHS, BIA, and the Army Corp of Engineers to seek assistance for the Navajo Nation. Lee, who grew up in the impacted community, said Congressman Lujan's office can also assist individuals in replacing lost vital records and would be donating school clothing for children of families that were affected by the flooding.

Tribal officials said they recognize the immediate needs and would continue to assist the families in addressing those needs, and begin to strategize for long-term solutions such as developing preventative measures to stop the reoccurrence of flooding in the area.

In his closing remarks, Delegate Chee said the purpose of the meeting was to provide a forum for the families to speak directly to leaders and officials about their immediate needs and to provide a firsthand perspective on the challenges and adversities.

"When you're not on the scene, you don't understand the entire picture. Hold us accountable to what we say – don't let us say things and walk away," said Delegate Chee to the impacted families in attendance.

Many of the residents thanked the officials for holding the meeting and said they are hopeful and optimistic that the community will recover with assistance from governmental and charitable organizations.

Shiprock Chapter officials have established a "GoFundMe" account to assist the families. Please search for "Shiprock Flood Emergency" on the GoFundMe website to donate.

###

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