

**Whipple, John J., OSE**

**From:** John W. Utton [jwu@ssslawfirm.com] **Sent:** Wed 5/7/2008 4:54 PM  
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**Wednesday, May 07, 2008**

**Navajo Water Rights Bill Heads To U.S. Senate Floor**

Associated Press

A bill to settle the Navajo Nation's water rights claim in the San Juan River Basin cleared its first hurdle today with approval by the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

The measure, sponsored by Sens. Pete Domenici and Jeff Bingaman, now heads to the full Senate.

The legislation would authorize a pipeline to serve the Gallup and Navajo communities and create a water rights settlement fund in the federal treasury to pay for it and future American Indian water agreements.

The cost - estimated at nearly \$900 million - could be split among the federal, state, local and tribal governments. The federal government would contribute funding over about two decades.

The Bush administration has opposed the project, saying it costs too much and would tie the hands of future presidents.

The state of New Mexico and the tribe signed an agreement in 2005 that resolves the tribe's water claims, but Congress still must enact legislation.

The legislation would recognize about 600,000 acre-feet per year that would go to the Navajos for agriculture, industrial, municipal, domestic and stock watering purposes.

An acre-foot, about 326,000 gallons, can meet the annual water needs of one to two U.S. households.

Domenici, R-N.M., said the project has been in the planning stages long enough and should be funded.

"We still face a challenge in finding offsets for this bill, but I think it is important that we go on record to show our earnestness in getting the Navajo Nation, as well as Gallup, the water they deserve," he said.

Bingaman, D-N.M., said the bill would bring an end to years of uncertainty over water resources in the Four Corners region and ensure adequate water supplies for years to come.

"I am very glad this bill is moving ahead," he said.

Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., has introduced a similar measure in the House. The Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power heard the bill last fall. Udall said he is optimistic it will move forward quickly.

"I will continue my work in the House to pass this bill and give northwestern New Mexico the water infrastructure it needs and deserves," he said.

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