

# COMMUNITY UPDATE

Division of Community Development Newsletter

May 2021

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## Did You Know...

The Navajo terms for some common everyday objects were borrowed from Spanish. For example: **pig**. In Spanish, it is **pitzote**. In Navajo, **bisóódi**

## Events:

**May: T'áátsoh - "Growth of bigger leaf plants"**

May 31: Memorial Day

**June: Ya'iishyaashchili - "Planting of Early Crops"**

June 1: Navajo Memorial Day

June 14: Flag Day

June 19: Juneteenth

June 20: Father's Day

June 21: Summer Solstice

## Nationwide 'Wash Station Challenge' to Provide New Hand-Washing Facilities to Navajo Nation Communities



A handwashing station on the Navajo Nation. RED FEATHER DEVELOPMENT GROUP

WASHINGTON, May 27, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- The International Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Foundation (IWSH) is excited to launch the Wash Station Challenge 2021, a new collaboration with the DigDeep Navajo Water Project, the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing, Pipefitting and Sprinkler Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada (UA), and Ferguson.

The Wash Station Challenge will be launched online Tuesday, June 1, and will run through the remainder of the month. Assembly projects will be hosted at 10 participating UA locals nationwide, where a series of mobile wash station facilities will be built that have been designed to provide a month's worth of non-potable water for daily hand-washing and general hygiene for a family of six. Once



completed, the wash stations will be shipped to designated DigDeep staging points on the Navajo Nation. DigDeep teams will then deliver, install and maintain the wash stations at sites that will initially include community health service facilities, chapter houses, and farms.

"These new hand-washing stations are going to provide further hygiene capacity for Navajo people and community sites that are currently without, and help further protect general public health and safety in the face of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic," said IWSH Managing Director Seán Kearney.

COVID-19 has hit the Navajo Nation particularly hard, registering some of the highest infection rates in the United States. Lack of running water has been a major factor, limiting residents' ability to wash their hands regularly to prevent the virus from spreading.

"The addition of these outdoor hand-washing stations in densely populated community centers is timely and necessary," said George McGraw, DigDeep founder and CEO. "Hand-washing is still a critical step in sanitation and stopping the spread of the virus."

Two wash station models have been developed – a grid-powered version that uses a 120-volt trough-type heater that sits inside a 210-gallon water tank, and an off-grid version that incorporates a 12-volt circulating pump and a timer. The pump is set on a timer to circulate the water and keep it from freezing, which is vital for wash stations that must perform through winter conditions in the most remote and exposed parts of the reservation. IWSH partner and sponsor Ferguson is generously donating materials for the assembly project, making them available for the 10 participating UA locals at Ferguson branches across the country.

"Our UA locals are proud to utilize our trained men and women to assist the Navajo Nation with this critical need," said UA Assistant Director of Education and Training Raymond Boyd. "These wash stations are going to have an immediate impact, providing non-potable water for hygiene, which will ultimately cut down on the spread of disease and virus."

The launch webinar at 4 p.m. EDT Tuesday, June 1, is free and open to all and will provide further insight and information on this pilot Wash Station Challenge collaboration. To register for the online launch, visit <https://bit.ly/2QYuo2r>.

SOURCE International Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Foundation

READ MORE AT: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/nationwide-wash-station-challenge-to-provide-new-hand-washing-facilities-to-navajo-nation-communities-301301357.html>



# CHID Housing Project Highlight

## Kinlichee, Arizona

The Housing Improvement Program (HIP) under the Community Housing & Infrastructure Department (CHID) began construction on a new one bedroom / one bathroom home in Kinlichee, AZ on September 14, 2020.

The construction crew faced many challenges to complete this home, including COVID-19 restrictions, severe weather conditions, scarce material quantity due to material cost



increases, but they were able to complete the project and conduct the final inspection on May 20, 2021.

After the final inspection, the HIP construction crew, Irving Shorty, provided Helen Tsosie the homeowners certificate and keys to her new home.

**A huge thank you to the HIP staff for their hard work and dedication in providing new homes to Navajo families.**

# Chapter Emergency Operations Response Teams Play Big Role During COVID-19 Pandemic

The Division of Community Development (DCD) leadership team would like to recognize the Navajo Nation Chapters for their dedication and commitment during the COVID-19 Emergency Operation on the Navajo Nation. In coordination with the Navajo Department of Health – Health Command Operations Center (HCOC), the Division of Community Development established the “Chapter Branch” within the incident command system in March 2020.



The “Chapter Branch” was led by Dr. Pearl Yellowman, Division Director, and Sonlatsa Jim-Martin, Department Manager for the Administrative Service Centers (ASC). Initially, the Chapter staff and elected Chapter Officials at all 110 Navajo Chapters were instructed to update their FEMA Incident Command System (ICS) training certifications in preparation for the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All DCD, ASC, and Chapter employees and Chapter Officials were instructed to take the ICS 100 course, “Introduction to the Incident Command System,” which introduces the Incident Command System (ICS) and provides the foundation for higher level ICS trainings. This course describes the history, features and principles, and organizational structure of the Incident Command System. It also explains the relationship between ICS and the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

They were also instructed to take the ICS 700 course, which provides an overview and an “Introduction of the National Incident

Management System (NIMS).” The National Incident Management System defines the comprehensive approach guiding the whole community - all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and the private sector - to work together seamlessly to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from the effects of incidents. The course provides learners with a basic understanding of NIMS concepts, principles, and components which Chapters are familiar with due to other emergency situations such as natural disasters (forest fires, floods, winter freeze, etc).

The following Navajo Chapters took an active role with the “DCD Chapter Branch” emergency operation and volunteered to become Staging Posts or Points of Distribution for emergency logistics and supply distribution during the pandemic which included receiving food supplies from large military trucks from the National Guard and large trucks from donations and CARES Act emergency supplies:

1. Standing Rock Chapter – New Mexico
2. Thoreau Chapter – New Mexico
3. Sheepsprings Chapter – New Mexico
4. San Juan Chapter – New Mexico
5. Ramah Chapter – New Mexico
6. Tohajilee Chapter – New Mexico
7. Alamo Chapter – New Mexico
8. Chinle Chapter – Arizona
9. Dennethotso Chapter – Arizona
10. Whitecone Chapter - Arizona
11. Ganado Chapter - Arizona

Tuba City Chapter worked in coordination with the Tuba City Fair Office Incident Command Center in Arizona. The Division of Community Development would like to recognize and acknowledge all the Chapter employees and Chapter Officials who participated in the Staging Posts and Points of Distribution under the Incident Command System in coordination with the Health Command Operations Center. “We want to recognize the CERT and ALERT Teams too,” stated Sonlatsa Jim-Martin, “The Chapters that had CERT/ALERT teams trained in the ICS mobilized very quickly.” Due to the unique and historic nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency response impacted the entire Navajo Nation and all 110 Chapters unlike a natural disaster response. The HCOC responded to the situation with a “Unified Command Center” with all hospitals, clinics, public health partners, and county, state, and federal representatives from the CDC and FEMA.



The ASC Department continues to encourage all Chapter employees and newly elected Officials to take the free online ISC 100 and ICS 700 courses at the following website. Before you take the FEMA training, make sure you register for your FEMA SID account first so you can get a copy of your official certificate of completion. DCD encourages community members and youth leaders to take the online courses available free of charge.

<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-100.c>



# Commission on Navajo Government Development hears chapter improvement reports and votes to allow hybrid meeting options



WINDOW ROCK Ariz. — This week, the Commission on Navajo Government Development (CNGD) held a two-day work session to receive reports on Navajo chapter governance and to enable commissioners to attend meetings either in-person or virtually as part of the ongoing coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. CNGD noted that their work session was held in person in Flagstaff, Arizona, while observing both Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Navajo Department of Health (NDOH) guidelines for mitigating Covid-19.

The work session's main purpose was to introduce the four new members, who were confirmed to the commission in March by the 24th Navajo Nation Council.

This week's session also emphasized the assessment of current and past Navajo Chapter government structures and systems relative to the preliminary results of the CNGD's ongoing study on Navajo Nation Chapter Governance during COVID-19.

Their research was conducted on 66-chapter officials and administration staff via an online survey further to examine their community's response to the pandemic.

The CNGD acknowledged the findings could present opportunities to explore how the pandemic's influence could positively affect future policy decisions at all levels of governance. Additionally, they hope the study's results will trigger long-term changes contributing to the digitalization of the Navajo Nation.

Division of Community Development (DCD) Executive Director Dr. Pearl Yellowman and Administrative Service Centers (ASC) Department Manager Sonlatsa Jim-Martin, also presented the Navajo Nation's current Chapters Ecosystem.

In their presentation, CNGD was informed of the DCD and ASC's current, past and future projects endeavor relative to the CNGD's chapter study and provided a comprehensive analysis of the Navajo chapter government.

Following the presentations, systematic concerns within chapter governance were raised when Navajo Tax Commission Executive Director Martin Ashley provided a presentation on "Navajo Nation Local Governance Act (LGA) and Chapter Distribution Authorization." According to Ashley, some of the LGA and Distribution processes have remained unchecked since their codification in 1998.

"The LGA requires the 5 Management model to be put in place for LGA-certified chapters so that they can get the funding, but some resolutions put it in conflict," said Ashley.

The LGA was codified by Council Resolution No. CAP-32-98 and is intended to distribute funds to LGA-certified chapters with the full implementation of a Five Management System.

Yet, the current funding distribution to chapters is contrary to the intent of the LGA chapter distribution allocation system with Council Resolutions No. CS-79-98 and BFO-140-98.

Both of which authorize the coordination, reporting and monitoring of the funds in advance of distributions.

More specifically, CS-79-98 states, "This resolution provides an independent grant of authority for such management and expenditure of Navajo Nation funds by the Chapters of the Navajo Nation, separate and apart from other codified and non-codified resolutions of the Navajo Nation Council which may provide a basis for this exercise of Chapter authority."

Navajo Department Assistant Attorney General, Rodgerick Begay, provided a presentation on the History of Navajo Local Governance, raising concerns about how the central government distributes funding to both LGA-certified and Non-Certified Chapters.

"There are historical practices in chapter government that do not apply in 2021, yet we hang on to old practices and laws from decades ago," said Begay. "Why do we give chapter funds when they still need to adopt a fiscal policy, and why do we give chapter heavy equipment when they have not implemented a property policy?"

Legislative Branch Commissioner Larry Rodgers suggested positive reformation could start within addressing the Navajo Nation Title 26 task force on Chapter Regionalization.

The CNGD said they intend to explore these issues and are committed to improving the funding process for LGA-certified and non-LGA-certified chapters based on the recommendations.

Moving forward, the Commission also indicated its intent to engage with the Navajo people at their level of governance, stating, "Whether at chapters and or agency councils to solicit their input on how they truly feel about their chapter government, with an emphasis on some of the findings from this work session and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The Commission concluded by adding their intentions to include a referendum ballot question in the 2022 Navajo Nation election so the people can help determine the future of the Navajo chapter government.

READ MORE at <https://files.constantcontact.com/0401fa70801/2f4e8e57-5c42-419d-b095-4818894763a6.pdf>

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# Heavy Equipment Updates



## May Deliveries

May 3rd - Tohatchi Chapter: Tractor Delivery

May 4th - Pinedale Chapter: Backhoe Delivery

May 4th - San Juan Chapter: Backhoe Delivery

May 9th - Becenti Chapter: Backhoe Delivery

May 9th - Manuelito Chapter: Truck Delivery

May 12th - Tselani/Cottonwood: Backhoe Delivery

May 12th - Red Valley Chapter: Backhoe Delivery

May 14th - Black Mesa Chapter: Crawler Dozer  
Delivery

May 19th - Indian Wells Chapter: Backhoe Delivery

May 19th - Nenahnezad Chapter: Backhoe Delivery

May 19th - Tsaile/Wheatfields Chapter: Motor Grader  
Delivery

May 24th - Becenti Chapter: Truck Delivery

May 25th - Churchrock Chapter: ATV Delivery

May 27th - Lukachukai Chapter: Motor Grader Delivery

May 27th - Navajo Mountain Chapter: Motor Grader  
Delivery

May 27th - Rockpoint Chapter: Motor Grader Delivery





# Could helium lift rural Arizona economy?

## Locals say they want answers about fracking plans



A capped helium mining operation is seen at the Nahata Dziil chapter of the Navajo Nation, near Chambers, Ariz., on April 8, 2021.  
Thomas Hawthorne/The Republic

**NAHATA DZIIL** — On red-dirt pastureland on the southern edge of the Navajo Nation, El Pahi stands beside what looks like a child's science experiment, but on a larger scale.

Six pill-shaped light-blue tanks are arranged beside what resembles a huge air-conditioner window unit and a silver cylindrical tank. A constant, high-pitched hum pierces the air as the wind blows across the range.

The contraption is a transfer station for a helium mining operation, one of a growing number in the remote region. The non-toxic gas exists in some of the highest concentrations in North America, and possibly the world, in pockets of the Navajo Nation and northeastern Arizona.

Helium is the universe's second-most abundant element, but it's in short supply on Earth, where imbalances in the market repeatedly cause global shortages. The non-combustible gas has historically been extracted as a byproduct of oil and natural gas, but private drilling companies are increasingly becoming interested in mining it on its own.

Beyond party balloons and blimps, helium has key uses in medical equipment like MRIs, semiconductors, and space technology. Physicists and academic researchers rely on helium for experiments.

But as companies have started drilling, local residents and environmentalists in this corner of the state have responded to the growing interest with alarm, concerned that hydraulic fracturing, colloquially known as "fracking," is coming to Arizona and will potentially endanger freshwater aquifers and air quality.

Companies and industry experts say helium extraction is a much more benign process than the type of fracking used in oil and gas operations in states like Texas and Pennsylvania. Government agencies say they have sufficient regulations in place to prevent environmental degradation.

Muddled jurisdiction over surface and mineral rights, opaque communication with locals, and the proprietary nature of the oil and gas industry have further fed mistrust between communities and the agencies tasked with overseeing drilling companies. On the Navajo Nation, the long and deadly legacy of resource extraction by outsiders has made locals skeptical at best.

"There isn't open communication, there isn't transparency of, 'This is exactly what's going on, this is what we're doing and how does that sound to you?'" said Robyn Jackson, a coordinator with the nonprofit environment group Diné C.A.R.E., which focuses on environmental justice issues on the Navajo Nation.

The helium industry isn't new — drilling for the gas occurred in Arizona in the 1960s and '70s — but the renewed interest is leaving tiny communities at the front lines with questions and government agencies trying to assure them of the protections in place.

Pahi, a retired engineer and rancher, gestured at a muddy stain on the ground.

"We don't know what that is, what these chemicals are that they're using," he said. "I'm just frustrated with the government, both Navajo government and

federal government. It seems like they don't care about the people living here, their daily lives, their ways of life."

### Trouble at a remote operation

The Nahata Dziil Chapter of the Navajo Nation occupies 350,000 acres of ranchland, called New Lands. About 30 miles north of Petrified Forest National Park, away from the highway billboards advertising kachina dolls and other Native American arts, the landscape stretches into a flat endlessness, dotted by scrubs and the shade of an occasional mesquite tree.



The New Lands are managed by a federal agency called the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation (ONHIR), established after Congress passed the Navajo-Hopi Settlement Act in 1974, which, on its face, aimed to resolve historic land disputes between the two tribes. The act resulted in the forced relocation of tens of thousands of Navajo people to New Lands.

But the government didn't purchase the mineral rights to the land, leaving it open for prospecting, something that rankles Pahi today.

A mile or so down a dirt road from the helium transfer station, a modest drilling well pokes out of the ground. It doesn't look like a stereotypical oil and gas well. There's no horsehead-bobbing pumpjack or thousand-foot-high fracking rig. It looks more like a simple plumbing system.

In 2019, a contractor with Dallas-based Ranger Development LLC drilled this well. During the process, workers left trash and construction materials at the

site, Pahi said. He shared photos of the trash left at the site with The Arizona Republic.

The wellpad wasn't fenced properly, allowing livestock to access a trench full of water used for drilling, Pahi said. They chewed on trash and materials left at the site. A rancher found a dead cow only a handful of yards from the well, foam dribbling from its mouth. Pahi came out and saw it himself. Another rancher had also found a cow near a well with a similar appearance. They suspect the animals drank contaminated water or ate something at the site, though they can't prove it. One rancher was reimbursed by Ranger for the loss.



During the rest of the drilling process, Pahi kept his livestock off that pasture. He is one of 39 permittees who graze the 350,000-acre ranch as part of their Native American Beef Brand, a co-op of Navajo ranchers producing sustainable beef.

Rancher El Pahi stands near a helium mining operation in the Nahata Dził chapter of the Navajo Nation, near Chambers, Ariz., on April 8, 2021.

Pahi said he repeatedly tried to alert the chapter's commissioners of the situation and complained to ONHIR with no results.

"There were a lot of plastic bottles, trash, plastic bags," Pahi said. "We ended up cleaning that whole area. And that's not our job. These people need to keep the environment clean."

It wasn't until Pahi happened to meet an enforcement officer with the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency at a conference that the company was alerted to the issues. Ranger cleaned up the rest of the mess and added fencing two weeks later, said Anderson Harvey, who opened the investigation into Pahi's complaints. The issue is still pending because COVID-19 soon after halted additional work, Harvey said.

"They were leaving all kinds of waste on site, some of the drilling area wasn't fenced in," Harvey said. "They stuck some T-posts in there and ran plastic garden fence around it, which is not the proper way of fencing. These cattle would roam right over it and unfortunately that's what happened."

A spokesperson for Ranger said the company adhered to its contracts with the local chapter leadership and ONHIR and that when it was alerted of the complaints, it responded in a timely manner. The company is not required to communicate directly with permittees.

"Ranger prides itself on being a respectful neighbor and partner to local tribes," the spokesperson said in an email. "Any time the business was alerted to an issue — and there have been very few — Ranger has immediately and appropriately responded and remediated. There is no evidence of outstanding problems related to our work there."

The water trenches are filled in and the trash is gone, but Pahi still has questions about some stains on the ground and a fluid that appears to be leaking out of the transfer station. An abandoned water truck still sits near a capped helium well on the pasture, the gas tank siphoned, seats covered in droppings and chewed up by wildlife.

Ranger is currently working with newly elected Nahata Dził commissioners and ONHIR on a new contract to drill an additional nine wells, but the new leadership doesn't plan to be supportive.

"We're taking a position opposing this," said recently elected Commissioner LaVonne Tsoosie. "Mr. Pahi and the families out there, they'd been trying to ask the prior commissioners for help and they were just overlooked. We're not going to stop fighting this."

### In Holbrook, worries about water

About 70 miles south of Nahata Dził, along Interstate 40, sits Holbrook, the gateway to the Petrified Forest. Giant dinosaur sculptures and multicolored petrified wood yards line its main streets.

Across a bridge over the Little Colorado River, bulbous hill formations disappear into flat mesas. The striking hues that inspired Spanish explorers to name the area "El Desierto Pintado," or "The Painted Desert," fade into scrub, some farm fields and the occasional pond on the edge of the small town of Snowflake.

Kevin and Debbie Gibson had hoped to retire there quietly. They purchased land and started living off the grid about nine years ago, choosing the area because of its freshwater aquifers and plentiful sunshine. They wanted a place where they could ride their horses and grow their own food.

Husband and wife Kevin and Debbie Gibson, founders of the group Protect Our Water AZ, stand inside their greenhouse at their home in Snowflake on April 8, 2021.

Others are there for the same reasons. People with chronic illness sought relief in a remote, unindustrialized place. Back-to-the-land environmentalists built self-sufficient Earth Ships. There are ranches too. Most rely on shallow water wells for their drinking water.

So when the Gibsons heard about helium drilling in the area, they were concerned. Kevin had worked as an engineer for oil companies throughout his career and he knew the potential for consequences.

"When my wife read an article that said the Bureau of Land Management was leasing for fracking some five miles to the north of us, I couldn't quite keep silent," he said. "My world's at risk as well as other people's."

They learned the region they lived in held some of the richest helium deposits in the world. The Holbrook Basin, which also encompasses Nahata Dził, is a geological area in northern Arizona that contains concentrations of helium gas as high as 8% to 10%, as compared to the industry benchmark of 0.3% to 1%.

Controversy erupted in September 2018, when the BLM auctioned off 3,000 acres near Petrified Forest National Park to a Canadian energy company called Desert Mountain Energy, which planned to drill for helium.

The Center for Biological Diversity, a Tucson-based conservation group, sued soon after, saying the agency violated federal law by not conducting new environmental reviews or consulting with area tribes. The BLM had claimed a 1988 resource management plan satisfied its legal obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act. Last year, the leases were suspended as a result of the lawsuit.

But local concerns reached a fever pitch when residents learned the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality had issued an aquifer protection permit to Ranger Development in 2017, allowing the company to use "acid stimulation," a form of hydraulic fracturing, on up to 80 helium wells in the Nahata Dził area. Holbrook residents worried the company would drill closer to them next.

A handful of residents formed the group No Fracking AZ. The Gibsons joined. But when they realized the group didn't want to get into politics, they formed their own: Protect Our Water AZ.

"I'm a mining engineer so I'm not anti-mining," Gibson said. "But we have to think about what is the cost of taking out those resources, especially in the case of water in Arizona."

### How the geology figures in

The Coconino aquifer is a main water supply for rural cities and towns in the Holbrook Basin. Flagstaff also depends on the groundwater. The aquifer is already stretched thin by drought and overuse; adding the risk of contamination from drilling isn't worth it, Kevin Gibson says. He and wife Debbie have met with U.S. Rep. Tom O'Halleran, D-Ariz., and former state Sen. Sylvia Allen, among others, to make their case.

Because it's such an important water resource, the Coconino aquifer has been well-studied, said Steve Rauzi, a retired Arizona Geological Survey geologist who has authored much of the literature on oil and gas prospects in the Holbrook Basin and elsewhere in Arizona. The underground formations where helium has been found is primarily brackish water, he said.

"If you're drilling for helium, you're only going to the top of the Coconino," Rauzi said. "It's a legitimate concern, but I don't think it's that big of an impact on groundwater overall. As far as the depth they're drilling, there's nobody going to be worrying about the water down there. It's highly saline to start with."

Most water wells in the area are about 300 to 800 feet deep, but the helium is located lower. Companies are generally not going deeper than 2,000 feet, though some permits specify depths up to 4,000 feet. The permits are publicly available on the Arizona Oil and Gas Conservation Commission's website.

"The simple answer is the helium companies are going below the zones where the locals are getting water, and they're producing gas from zones that are not usable aquifers because there are so many dissolved solids in the water," said Kurt Constenius, a geologist who works for a number of helium exploration companies, including Ranger, which is the only company actively producing the gas in the Holbrook Basin.

The sandstone makeup of much of the Little Colorado Plateau, which encompasses the Coconino aquifer, wouldn't require the high level of pressure, volume and highly toxic drilling fluids used in shale gas formations in places like Texas, said Kristine Uhlman, a retired hydrogeologist who has worked extensively in Arizona and has worked with the University of Texas at Austin to study the impact of fracking on groundwater. At this point, most companies are using only air or water to drill.

The conflation between large-scale fracking and acid stimulation is simply inaccurate, Uhlman said.

"If there were to be any risk of any contamination of shallow aquifers, that would be if somebody crashes their truck and spills their gasoline or something," she said.



Fracking in states like Texas uses millions of gallons of water and chemicals injected thousands of feet underground, then shunted for miles horizontally. It requires dozens of trucks and large drilling rigs. Studies have found that the process can hurt groundwater supplies and even cause earthquakes, though the oil and gas industry denies these links.

In contrast, acid stimulation uses significantly less fluid and is injected at much lower pressures and volumes, said Uhlman. Any remaining fluid is either neutralized by the geologic formation or flows back to the surface to be disposed of once the helium is extracted, she said.



The process is much shorter and smaller in scale. The drilling rig is usually mounted on a single truck, said Constenius.

"There's overlaps with both methods in that you're putting fluids down a hole and then there's potential chemical reactions," he said. "So, at the simplest, they're very similar. But with hydraulic fracking, which is a real hot button issue, that's a process, when compared to the Holbrook Basin, in both scale and method, that's completely different."

Helium itself is a non-combustible, non-toxic gas that forms deep in the mantle of the Earth from the decay of radioactive materials like uranium. In this region, it is found primarily with nitrogen, another non-toxic gas.

Most helium escapes the Earth into the atmosphere, but in certain places, like the Holbrook Basin, it gets trapped in salt domes or other geological formations, like a bubble leveling device. As a result, the drilling process would be similar to drilling a water well in most cases.

"Helium is coming up from the Earth's interior all over the planet," Uhlman said. "It's coming up in your backyard. It's coming out at the football field. It's coming out everywhere at a steady basis. And the only reason you want to drill for it is if it's been captured underneath a layer. This gas wants to move up and it doesn't move horizontally, it just moves up and it makes a pool. You drop a conventional well into it and then you've got your helium."

In other parts of the state, like the Four Corners region and less well-understood areas of the Coconino aquifer, the risk is different and dependent on the specific geological structures in which drilling is occurring, Rauzi said. In the case of acid stimulation, the most important thing is ensuring that companies are casing, or protectively lining, their wells properly, he said.

The chemical makeup of acids used for drilling is often proprietary, which furthers locals' skepticism. Ranger declined to provide the specifics of the volume and type of acid it uses. A company working in the Four Corners region on the Navajo Nation, Tacitus LLC, has used nitrogen and a soap-like foam to stimulate converted oil wells for helium.

A spokesperson for Desert Mountain Energy, a Canadian company drilling in the area, said if the company does end up using acid to stimulate any of its wells, its first choice would be a citric acid, followed by hydrochloric acid, which is commonly used in swimming pools. So far, it has only used air to drill, she said.

Last year, Flagstaff filed a restraining order against the company to block drilling on leased state trust land that is within a mile and a half of Red Gap Ranch, which the city purchased to access the Coconino Aquifer and ensure its future groundwater supply.

The city declined to comment citing pending litigation.

"I think, truthfully, that acid stimulation is going to be used on a number of wells," said Constenius. "The one well where the procedure was performed yielded excellent results. So it's not just a one-off."

Will that open the way for drilling deeper or searching for other resources? Constenius thinks not.

"As for potentially finding oil, it's approaching zero chance that there would be oil found in the Holbrook Basin," Constenius said. "Another way to say this is the major oil companies came through Arizona in the '60s and drilled some wells and it was a graveyard. I think the notion that suddenly Arizona's going to turn into west Texas is not going to happen."

#### Are the regulations sufficient?

The Arizona Oil and Gas Conservation Commission regulates oil and gas extraction in the state. Companies must obtain a permit to drill, as well as permissions from governing agencies depending on if they are operating on private land, state trust land, the Navajo Nation or public land.

Companies must submit detailed plans to the commission outlining their well design and drilling and casing processes. During drilling, the commission requires companies to submit weekly to biweekly reports of their activities and will carry out inspections if there are complaints, said Frank Thorwald, the commission's chairman.

With the steadily rising interest in helium, the state commission has worked with the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission, which supports member states, to keep up-to-date regulations and best practices. The state wanted to make sure Arizona's rules and regulations are in line with other states that have a similar level of production, Thorwald said.

As a result of that work, the state commission plans to send updates to the regulations to Gov. Doug Ducey for approval this summer. There were few changes outside of clarifying language, Thorwald said. The commission is also working to update its website to make permits and the permitting process more accessible to the public, he said.

The oil and gas commission does not require regular inspections on wells, but would inspect a site if a credible complaint is received, Thorwald said.

If a company plans to use acid stimulation, it is required to get an aquifer protection permit from ADEQ, a process that can take a year or more. The permit requires companies to outline how they will carry out the drilling, a financial statement for how they will close out drilling in the case of bankruptcy, hydrogeological studies on groundwater quality, and the specific technology the company will use to prevent discharge or spills, according to ADEQ spokesperson Caroline Oppeleman.

Companies are also required to provide ADEQ with a list of the types and volumes of fluids that would be used to carry out acid stimulation, Oppeleman said.

Once a permit is approved, the agency requires regular reports from the company and conducts inspections yearly, or more if there are complaints, Oppeleman said.

"ADEQ does not anticipate adverse impacts to groundwater from well stimulation associated with helium gas extraction activities," Oppeleman wrote in response to emailed questions from The Republic. "Potential impacts to aquifers are unlikely due to the helium gas extraction well design, stimulation design and operation, and site specific geologic conditions, which all contribute to containing movement of injected fluids during stimulation."

A trench used while a company drilled for helium on ranchland near Chambers, Ariz. Rancher El Pahi said a cow was found dead near one of these trenches. Ranchers suspect it died from consuming the contaminated water, which wasn't properly fenced by the company.

To locals like the Gibsons and others in their camp, the process feels like a fox guarding a henhouse.

"Some people say, 'Oh, it will get diluted,' but how many times have you said that about substances and found that just a couple molecules are dangerous to a human?" Gibson said. "If we were doing this in the middle of the desert with no water supply and no population, then I would say go for it. The bottom line here is, they're doing this over the Coconino aquifer."

Still, it's unlikely there will be a sudden boom in production. There are fewer than a dozen companies with active drilling leases in the state, mostly small companies. Only Ranger Development and Texas-based Prize Energy have received aquifer protection permits from ADEQ. Ranger remains the only company actively producing helium in the state.

Interest remains steady. Texas-based oil giant Halliburton recently held meetings with the commission regarding helium. Kinder Morgan holds a large lease near St. Johns, where it had received an aquifer protection permit to carry out hydraulic fracturing to extract carbon dioxide. The field also likely contains helium. The company declined to respond to The Republic regarding its future plans.

Some companies appear to have less interest in actually extracting helium, but rather are attempting to capitalize on the buzz growing around Arizona's rich helium deposits.

Rare Earth Exploration, a Texas-based company, received a drilling permit from the Oil and Gas Commission in April 2019. It also holds active leases with the Arizona State Land Department. In November of that year, a Texas State Securities Board commissioner filed an emergency order against the company for fraudulent claims to attract investors.

Among some industry experts, there have been whispers about other companies as well, but no legal action to date.



"The Holbrook Basin is like the Wild West," Constenius said. "There's some professional companies. And then there's some disreputable companies, what I call promoters, where they're actually kind of fleecing people on the hype of helium."

### A growing, fractured market

The U.S. helium market started to develop before World War II, when helium was discovered in Texas and Kansas. The government soon recognized the importance of the gas and established a federal reserve, providing taxpayer-funded incentives for oil and gas companies to extract helium that they happened to pull up with oil. The Federal Helium Reserve, located outside Amarillo, Texas, grew until 1973, when it became clear the amount of helium being supplied outpaced the demand.



As a result, in 1996, Congress passed the Helium Privatization Act, assigning the Bureau of Land Management to operate the reserve. The act required the agency to sell off the crude helium to private vendors and cease operations this year.

In part due to depletions in the reserve, by 2018, the U.S. was experiencing a helium shortage, causing helium prices to spike. The COVID-19 pandemic reduced the demand, but economists and companies say the closure of the federal helium reserve and declining production in fields in Kansas and Texas make discoveries in Arizona an alluring bet.

One thing is certain: The need for helium is not going away anytime soon. Some 30 percent of the helium used in the U.S. in 2019 was used for MRIs in medical settings.

Analytical and laboratory applications accounted for 14%, and engineering and scientific applications 6%, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

A contractor with Ranger Development LLC drills a helium well near Chambers, Ariz.

Most helium comes from the U.S. and Qatar. The U.S., which has historically consumed about 40 percent of the world's helium, imports much of the gas from the small Middle Eastern country. Algeria, too, has a substantial supply.

Until the sell-off of the reserve, the U.S. was supplying about 30% to 40% of the world's helium, but that's fallen to about 15% to 20%. It imports the bulk of its helium largely from Qatar and Russia, said Jason Demers, the founder of helium company Tacitus LLC, which is operating in New Mexico on the Navajo Nation.

"I think it does leave the United States in a situation where they don't want to be dependent on Russia and Qatar and Algeria," Demers said.

Recent discoveries in Russia and Tanzania may change the market again. Companies see a strategic interest in the U.S. maintaining its own steady domestic supply, especially in a market that can shift dramatically overnight.

In 2017, for example, Saudi Arabia severed ties with Qatar, leading to the unintended side effect of Qatar shutting down its helium production, causing an immediate world helium shortage.

"There's always been a high level of inconsistency in terms of the supply," said Janie Chermak, an economics professor at the University of New Mexico who specializes in natural resources. "So if you had a ready supply and a consistent supply, it would stabilize prices, which means you probably wouldn't see those spikes that you saw in the past and you wouldn't see the shortages."

When helium was controlled by the government, prices were in the \$60 per thousand cubic foot range. Currently, the market demands between \$200 and \$400 dollars per thousand cubic foot, Demers said. That's out of reach for many academic research institutions.

"There is no more \$60 helium in the world," Demers said. "And so helium has become a very, very expensive commodity for users who don't have the resources to pay for it and so bringing on more domestic supply is something that we've been focusing on."

Building infrastructure around the helium supply chain will be another piece of the puzzle, Chermak said.

"If helium can be produced at a price that makes it competitive with the sources that we have, and if it can be done in such a way that protects the environment, it has potential," Chermak said. "Because the one thing I don't see is demand for helium going away."

### Can helium be part of a transition?

Some believe the growing interest in helium in Arizona could lead to an economic boost for the Navajo Nation in particular, which is facing steep declines in revenue with the closure of coal plants.

"I really think that if there are the massive quantities that are theorized, then it could really have a larger political implication for the Navajo Nation," said Carl Slater, Navajo Nation Council delegate who represents the Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsailé-Wheatfields and Tsé Ch'ízhí chapters. He also serves as vice chair of the council's Health, Education and Human Services Committee.

"If you compare an energy resource that's contributing to climate change, to a resource that's used in medical technology, cooling MRI machines, producing semiconductors, all sorts of things that aren't necessarily just adding to the amount of carbon in the atmosphere, then it ends up having a different net effect," Slater said. "The important thing is make sure it's not damaging to our people's environment and homelands so that we can continue to live at home in our traditional way."

Slater worked closely with his constituents and the helium company Tacitus LLC to develop what he believes is a fair deal for drilling. Among other things, the legislation he authored establishes royalties and payments for a percentage of the company's profit to the tribe and the local community. It also establishes a community reinvestment fund. The legislation was stalled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"My thought process was, let's start having this conversation now because there's a bunch of production that's coming online soon and if we don't have the conversation now, then we're going to feel backed into a corner to enter it later, probably under worse conditions," Slater said. "And, you know, we need to start building the fluency as leadership to discuss this resource, what we'd like to do with it."

While he would prefer no resource extraction on the Navajo Nation at all, he believes investing in helium could give the tribe more political influence. But at each stage of negotiations, the costs and benefits need to be carefully weighed, he said.

"In general, the history of resource extraction on Navajo is pretty horrible, so if you start with that premise, you should be very wary of any sort of extraction," Slater said. "That said, as a leader, I'm looking at revenues coming in that are like two-thirds to half of what was sustaining our government for the past 10 years or so."

He said a balance between helium extraction and Navajo way of life can be achieved if communication is above board and the council addresses the issues in a strategic manner early on. Fair payments to the Nation and investments in the local community where drilling is occurring is essential, he said.

"I've tried to have the middle ground be tilted in favor toward the Navajo Nation and its citizens," Slater said. "We need to start having the conversation, because if it just happens in the shadows, then we get really bad deals, we get really poor decision making, there isn't the accountability that should be there."

He believes the agreement with Tacitus can serve as an example for how to properly manage helium extraction on the Navajo Nation. That company has been drilling in the community of Little Water near Sanostee, New Mexico, since 2018. Before drilling began, the company prioritized communicating with the community, outside of the required approvals from local chapter government, the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources and the council.

So far, Tacitus has paid the Nation more than half a million dollars, most of it over the past 12 months, when the project became commercial, Demers said.

The company has also paid more than \$100,000 in investments to the Little Water community, including constructing and maintaining roads, building livestock water sources, fixing a water windmill and providing a backhoe to help the community bury those who died from COVID-19.

"I believe it's about communicating. You tend to feel more comfortable with what your neighbor is building in his backyard if he talks to you about it than if he's doing it in the darkness of night," Demers said. "That's an investment to make, setting up these town halls and meeting with people and showing them what you're doing. And you can either do that upfront and save yourself a lot of grief or you can spend a lot of money on the back end fighting."

Tacitus is currently selling about a million and a half cubic feet of helium per month to a domestic buyer, Demers said.

"I truly believe the Navajo Nation is going to be a key player in the energy transition for the United States in helium," Demers said. "America is in a position that there needs to be additional domestic supply in order to get to a point of being balanced and self-sufficient. And so in bringing that in for a landing, this is where the Navajo Nation is sitting in a position to develop enough helium resources to help manage the U.S. supply shortage."

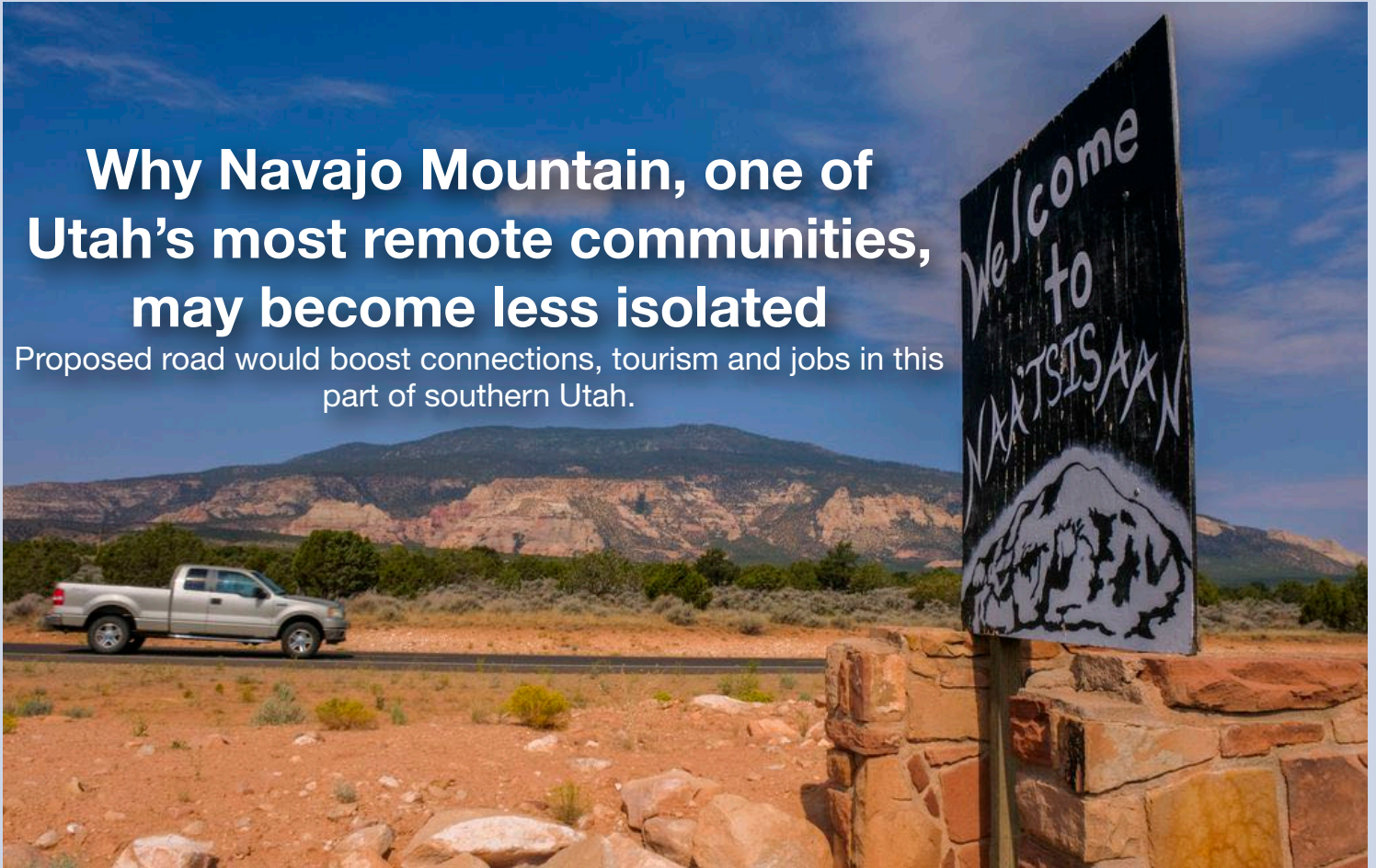
READ MORE AT: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/local/arizona-environment/2021/05/16/helium-mines-could-lift-arizona-economy-but-locals-fear-effects/7113083002/>





# Why Navajo Mountain, one of Utah's most remote communities, may become less isolated

Proposed road would boost connections, tourism and jobs in this part of southern Utah.



(Leah Hogsten | Tribune file photo) Nestled between its namesake mountain and Lake Powell, Navajo Mountain, shown in August 2020, is one of the most isolated communities in Utah. In newly proposed road would increase connections in the area.

By Zak Podmore

**Bluff •** The small southern Utah town of Navajo Mountain, one of the most isolated communities in the Lower 48, may soon find a new connection to the state's highway system if a \$110 million project moves forward.

The Navajo Mountain Chapter of the Navajo Nation currently has around 500 residents who must drive south through Arizona to access basic services such as a grocery store or laundromat. The community's center is only 45 miles from Monument Valley but getting there requires a 120-mile drive, and it takes three hours to reach Blanding, San Juan County's most populous town.

On Thursday, officials the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition hosted Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Utah Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson, Navajo Nation Council Delegate Herman Daniels Jr. and San Juan County representatives to discuss a road proposal that would shorten drive times and to tour part of the proposed route.

"Having the lieutenant governor and county officials see the current road conditions firsthand offers them great insight into the challenges that Navajo people deal with every day," Nez said in a statement. "Many residents commute through these rocky terrains for long hours each day for basic services and necessities, hauling water for their homes and livestock, and going to school and work."

He added the road would boost area tourism, bringing in tax revenue and job opportunities.

## 'Extreme isolation'

San Juan County Commissioner Willie Grayeyes, who was born on Piute Mesa and has served as a Navajo Mountain Chapter official at various times throughout his career, told RedRock 92.7 last week that Navajo Mountain has too often been passed over for services. A lawsuit against the San Juan School District in the 1990s led to the construction of a high school in the area. Grayeyes, who sits on the board of the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition, said the road project would be immensely beneficial to residents.

“I encourage anybody who has never been to Navajo Mountain to drive the [existing] road,” he said. “They’ll experience the extreme isolation, remoteness.”

The road proposal became a campaign issue in the latest chapter election when some residents of Piute Mesa — a strip of land between Monument Valley and Navajo Mountain that’s home to about a couple dozen families and is currently accessible only by a rough dirt road — expressed concerns about the road construction’s impact on the area’s remote character.

Other residents backed the planned road.

A draft proposal, prepared by Jones and DeMille Engineering, anticipates three phases for the project: a \$49 million dirt road connection between Navajo Mountain and Oljato; a \$30.2 million dirt spur heading north across the San Juan River to connect to Highway 276 east of Halls Crossing; and, lastly, the paving of both new roads.

The initial phase would shave about 55 miles off the current three-hour, one-way journey from Navajo Mountain to Blanding, likely reducing driving times by 40 minutes.

The connection to Highway 276 would reduce the trip by 13 additional miles, but it would require the construction of a \$10.5 million bridge near Clay Hills Crossing on the San Juan River as well as several smaller bridges.

All phases of the project would likely need financial support from the Navajo Nation, Utah and the federal government.

## Bringing water to remote areas

On Thursday, the tribal, county and state officials also heard a presentation on new drinking water projects, which are expected to be built, thanks to the passage of the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act in December.

“[We also want] to develop a water system to serve our remote community,” Grayeyes said.

Residents of Piute Mesa and surrounding areas currently haul water to their homes or rely on deliveries from the nonprofit DigDeep, but the legislation recognizes the Navajo Nation’s right to more water from the Colorado River and provides \$220 million in funding for water projects in San Juan County.

“We have to continue working together and meeting on a regular basis to strategize and to make sure that we tap into all available resources,” Nez said, “which may include the American Rescue Plan Act and the Biden-Harris administration’s proposed American Jobs Plan that would provide transportation infrastructure funds. We appreciate Lt. Gov. Henderson for visiting the Navajo Nation, and we look forward to continuing to work with her and Gov. Spencer Cox on water and transportation infrastructure initiatives.”



(Christopher Cherrington | The Salt Lake Tribune)

READ MORE AT: <https://www.sltrib.com/news/2021/05/09/why-navajo-mountain-one/>



# Bulletin Board

## Rock Point community to receive funding for Route 8070 improvements



ROCK POINT, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Council Delegate Carl Slater, and Miss Navajo Nation Shaandiin Parrish joined Rock Point Chapter officials and community members in Rock Rock, Ariz. on Thursday, to mark the approval of Resolution CAP-21-21 to allocate approximately \$833,000 from the Navajo Nation's Sihasin Fund for road improvements for a portion of Route 8070. The road project will be overseen by the Navajo Nation Division of Transportation.

Rock Point Chapter President Patterson Yazzie and Community Services Coordinator Charlene Kirk spoke about transportation challenges for school buses, emergency responders, elderly people, and many others who rely on Route 8070 on a daily basis. Former Chapter President Jennie Harvey also provided an overview of the years of planning, coordinating, and working together to complete pre-construction requirements.

Before signing the resolution, President Nez thanked the Rock Point Chapter officials, Delegate Slater, and many others for their commitment and hard work to complete all of the clearances and

requirements to allow for the project to be funded and proceed. He also acknowledged and remembered the late Nelson S. BeGaye, who represented the Rock Point community for many years as a member of the Navajo Nation Council and played an instrumental role in the development of the project. Former Delegate BeGaye passed away in April.

"Our Nation lost a great leader recently. Honorable Nelson BeGaye advocated for the Route 8070 road improvements when he was a member of the Council. Now, we have Delegate Slater who has carried on those efforts. We are proud of the work of the community of Rock Point and we look forward to seeing the road improvements being completed under the leadership of Navajo Division of Transportation Executive Director Garret Silversmith. Congratulations to the Rock Point community," said President Nez.

He also spoke about the Nez-Lizer Administration's ongoing efforts to work with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Biden-Harris Administration to change federal policies to advance transportation projects and to secure funds under the proposed American Jobs Plan.

Council Delegate Carl Slater, who represents the Rock Point community as a member of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, also thanked past and current leaders and spoke about the need to improve infrastructure in all communities to increase the Nation's capacity to create jobs and more opportunities for Navajo people, including those residing off of the Navajo Nation.

"This is my commitment to this community to honor the legacy of Honorable Nelson BeGaye and what he stood for, which was empowering our local communities. When I ran for Council, a primary purpose of my campaign and my work thus far on the Council, is making sure there is

that there is a homeland that our children can return to. We need the modern amenities and rights of 21st century living – a roof over our heads, water to our homes, electricity to our homes, broadband to our homes, and a safe route to get to school or to receive dialysis or to a hospital. That's what this project represents," said Delegate Slater.

Navajo Nation Division of Transportation Executive Director Garret Silversmith also recognized the local leaders and President Nez for supporting the Route 8070 project and thanked his staff members for their dedication.

"This project is going to be a change for the better for this community. We've already made some significant progress for Route 8070. One of the major challenges is always the environmental clearance and that's already been taken care of. I'd like to acknowledge and thank my staff as well for their involvement and hard work at Navajo DOT. Many have been involved since the inception of this project. We have five departments within Navajo DOT and they all played a role. We're going to do our best to complete this project as soon as possible," said Navajo Nation Division of Transportation Executive Director Garret Silversmith.

Former Navajo Nation Vice President Rex Lee Jim, Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency Executive Director Valinda Shirley, and Division of Natural Resources Executive Director Dr. Rudy Shebala were also in attendance to support the Rock Point community. The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President thanks the Rock Point Chapter and Rock Point Community School for hosting the event, which was live-streamed on the Nez-Lizer Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/NezLizer2018>.

Read more at: <https://bit.ly/3hF9Wyi>

## FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit Program will begin on May 12 to provide low-income families with discounted broadband service

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Eligible households can enroll through an approved provider or by visiting <https://getemergencybroadband.org>.

The FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit Program will provide eligible households with discounts of up to \$75 a month if the household is on tribal land. It also will provide a one-time discount of up to \$100 on a computer or tablet for eligible households. The program is open to the following:

- Households that participate in an existing low-income or pandemic relief program offered by a broadband provider
- Lifeline subscribers, including those that are on Medicaid or accept SNAP benefits
- Households with kids receiving free and reduced-price lunch or school breakfast
- Pell grant recipients
- Those who have lost jobs and seen their income reduced in the last year

"Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer are encouraging eligible Navajo families to enroll in the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Emergency Broadband Benefit Program beginning on May 12,

to receive a monthly discount on the cost of broadband service from an approved provider.

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the need for broadband connectivity to meet the needs of our students, teachers, first responders, elders, and others. Our administration has met with the FCC on several occasions to advocate for the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, spectrum use, and other tools to help increase broadband connectivity. With the anticipated American Rescue Plan Act funds, we are planning for more broadband infrastructure development for our communities. We encourage all eligible Navajo families to contact your service provider to enroll in the program," said President Nez.

On Feb. 12, Vice President Lizer participated in a roundtable discussion hosted by the FCC to gather input and recommendations to help with the establishment of the program. He spoke about the vast needs for telecommunications improvements to provide broadband services for families, students, tele-medicine, first responders, and many others.

"Thank you to FCC Acting Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel and all of the members for working

together with the Navajo Nation and incorporating our input into the development of the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. The federal-tribal partnerships that we build together result in great benefits for our citizens and our communities. We look forward to continuing to partner with the FCC as we move forward," stated Vice President Lizer.

Several local participating broadband service providers include:

Arizona: Cellular One of northeast Arizona, Frontier Communications, NTUA Choice Wireless, Table Top Telephone Company

New Mexico: Cellular One of northeast Arizona, Commnet Four Corners, NTUA Choice Wireless, Sacred Winds Communications, WNM Communications

Utah: Cellular One of northeast Arizona, Commnet Four Corners, Frontier Communications, NTUA Choice Wireless

To search for more broadband service providers, please visit the FCC's website at: <https://getemergencybroadband.org>.

READ MORE AT: <https://bit.ly/3p1K55t>

# Bulletin Board

## Former Auditor General Elizabeth Begay to serve as Acting Controller



WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—On Thursday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer appointed Elizabeth Begay, former Navajo Nation Auditor General, to serve as the acting Controller for the Navajo Nation until a new Controller is appointed and confirmed. Former Controller Pearl Kirk was removed on Wednesday by a vote of the Navajo Nation Council. Begay served as the Auditor General from 2007 until her retirement in 2018. She is a Certified Internal Auditor and a Certified Fraud Examiner. She began her service with the Navajo Nation in 1989 with the Division of Economic Development, and later served as a minerals auditor for the Minerals Audit Department before joining the Office of the Auditor General in 1991. Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Science in Commerce with a major in Economics and also studied Accounting at U.C. Berkeley. “Elizabeth Begay has extensive experience and knowledge through her nearly 30 years of previous work for the Navajo Nation. As the former Auditor General, she demonstrated great work ethic and promoted accountability related to audit findings and financial management. Her professionalism and commitment to serving the Navajo people will contribute greatly to the Office of the Controller and provide fiduciary stability for the Nation. With her appointment, the functions and duties of the Office of the Controller will continue for the benefit of the Navajo Nation. We also assure our financial partners that the Navajo Nation’s financial system and controls are stable and continue to function without interruption,” said President Nez. Begay is originally from the Philippines. For nearly 30 years, she has been married to Calvin Begay, a member of the Navajo Nation, who is originally from Naschitti, N.M. Together, they have three children and six grandchildren.

“I’m humbled and I thank President Nez and Vice President Lizer for their confidence in me to serve as the acting Controller. I will do my best to serve to the full extent of my ability. I am looking forward to the challenge and will do my very best,” said Begay. “We are confident that Elizabeth Begay will provide the guidance and expertise to ensure the daily operations of the Office of the Controller and as we proceed into the upcoming budget season and with the anticipated American Rescue Plan Act funds. We thank her and her family for answering the call to duty once again for the Navajo people,” Vice President Lizer said. Begay will assume her new role on Friday, May 21. The appointment of the acting Controller is subject to the consent of the Budget and Finance Committee. Once a new Controller is appointed, the appointment will be subject to confirmation by the Navajo Nation Council.

READ MORE AT: <https://www.navajo-nsn.gov/News%20Releases/OPVP/2021/May/FOR%20IMMEDIATE%20RELEASE%20-%20Former%20Auditor%20General%20Elizabeth%20Begay%20to%20serve%20as%20Acting%20Controller.pdf>

## Navajo Nation now has over 100,000 fully vaccinated individuals

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer are pleased to report that the Navajo Nation now has over 100,000 individuals who are fully vaccinated for COVID-19 as of Thursday. The Navajo Area Indian Health Service reported that 247,165 total vaccine doses have been received, 225,819 administered, which represents over 91-percent. 100,101 individuals have been fully vaccinated.

“This is a great achievement for the Navajo people and our health care workers. Well over half of the adult population on the Navajo Nation is fully vaccinated. If you consider only the individuals who live on the Navajo Nation and receive their health care service from the Navajo Area IHS, that percentage increases to over 70-percent. Our next goal is to reach a 75-percent vaccination rate before we consider reopening our Nation to visitors. The vaccination success we are seeing is thanks to our Navajo people who are receiving the vaccine to protect themselves and others. Our health care workers are doing an outstanding job. Without them, we wouldn’t be where we are today in terms of record low numbers of COVID-19 cases and lower numbers of deaths. This is a great milestone, but we have to continue informing our people and encouraging them to get vaccinated. Community immunity is our goal,” said President Nez.

Health care facilities across the Navajo Nation continue to administer COVID-19 vaccines during drive-thru events or by appointment. If you would like to receive the vaccine, please contact your health care provider for more information for your Service Unit. For more information about COVID-19 vaccines, please visit: <https://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19/COVID-19-Vaccine>.

“Together, we are overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic one day at a time. The strength and resilience of our people has been demonstrated each and every day. As we emerge from the pandemic, we must continue to take precautions even after being vaccinated and keep supporting one another. Most importantly, please continue to pray for our people, our health care workers, and those who have lost loved ones,” said Vice President Lizer.

This week, President Nez and Vice President Lizer issued a proclamation recognizing May 6 – 12, 2021 as “Navajo Nation Nurses Appreciation Week,” to honor the tremendous contributions and sacrifices of frontline warriors, including nurses, CHR’s and other health care workers who continue to put themselves at risk to save lives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

READ MORE AT: <https://www.navajo-nsn.gov/News%20Releases/OPVP/2021/May/FOR%20IMMEDIATE%20RELEASE%20-%20Navajo%20Nation%20now%20has%20over%20100000%20fully%20vaccinated%20individuals.pdf>

## First phase of tribal office complex on schedule

WINDOW ROCK -- Two three-story office buildings, the first phase of a planned office, hotel and convention center complex, are on schedule and should be completed by the end of the year, the CEO of the Navajo Nation Hospitality Enterprise said Thursday.

However, skyrocketing costs for construction materials in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic might affect the next phase, a third office building that is about to be put out to bid.

“It’s horrible,” said Stan Sapp in a telephone interview. “Things that were feasible six months ago aren’t today. But we’ll deal with that when the time comes.”

The current construction, he said, is under a fixed-price contract, so to put it bluntly, the price hike is “the contractor’s problem, not ours,” he said.

“But, of course, we’re sympathetic to them,” he added. “They’re going through a difficult time getting the supplies they need.”

The two buildings now going up are already reserved by the Navajo Nation Program for Self-Reliance and the Division of Behavioral and Mental Health. If all goes according to schedule, they should be able to move in next January.

“We already have a long waiting list for the third building,” Sapp said. “As you know, office space is hard to come by in Window Rock. We should have no problem at all filling it.”

After the office buildings are complete, the next phase will be an 82-room hotel and convention center.

The existing Quality Inn kitchen is large enough to cater large gatherings, he added.



After the new hotel is built, the Quality Inn, which is also owned by the enterprise, will probably be converted to executive suites or offices, Sapp said.

The project, once completed, is expected to draw \$6.5 million a year to the Nation and employ 50 people.

The project is being built by Keyah Construction with Iron Rock Engineering as the engineer. NTUA is providing utilities and Native American Bank is financing it.

“We’ve been working on a plan for that area since 2013,” Sapp revealed. “We’re so happy to see it finally happening.”

The buildings are behind the Quality Inn.

Read more at: <https://navajotimes.com/reznews/first-phase-of-tribal-office-complex-on-schedule/>



# Bulletin Board

## Making her mark on the Navajo Nation, Thomasina Blackwater UArizona Outstanding Graduate



TUCSON, Ariz. — Thomasina Blackwater received her bachelor's, master's, and now medical degree from the University of Arizona.

"Having been there for such a long time, I knew where all of my support was and all the resources and that helped me get through the whole journey, which was pretty tough. Having good friends and my family there to support me, that helped a lot," said Blackwater.

Blackwater grew up near the Navajo Nation, which has hit very hard in the start of the pandemic.

"As a medical student, you feel pretty helpless, because I couldn't be there to support my community," said Blackwater.

So in being a part of the Association of Native American Medical Students and the Real Health Profession Program, she and others helped provide PPE and food to Navajo members, during a time when COVID-19 cases were skyrocketing on the reservation.

"We got a lot of PPE out there and a lot of different basic necessities. And I felt really good about that. I felt more positive on that note," said Blackwater.

Blackwater was highly involved during her time at the U of A, being a part of several diversity and medically centered groups. One initiative she is very passionate about is improving the pipeline for Native American medical students.

"We're very limited in medical school, and even as physicians, we're very low in numbers. Getting medical students in, I know all those challenges because I experienced those challenges personally," said Blackwater.

Blackwater is headed to her top-pick, UCLA, harbor for a residency in family medicine. But she will be keeping her strong ties with Southern Arizona and the Navajo Nation.

"I'm actually a part of another program with a scholarship where I come back to my community on the Navajo Nation and do a five-year pay back. So that's what I'm looking forward to I going to UCLA to do my training as a family medicine doc and bring what I learn back to my community," said Blackwater.

READ MORE AT: <https://www.kgun9.com/spiritofsoaz/making-her-mark-on-the-navajo-nation-thomasina-blackwater>

## Navajo Nation OKs reopening flea, roadside markets under yellow status

FARMINGTON — The Navajo Department of Health loosened restrictions for certain businesses and allowed flea markets and roadside markets to reopen beginning on May 24 under guidelines in the latest public health emergency order.

The health department is keeping businesses in the yellow tier of its reopening plan as its coronavirus case rate remains low with a slowed infection rate.

The order increased the capacity for indoor dining at restaurants to 50%. It also boosted capacity to 50% for marinas, parks, museums and zoos.

However, areas managed by the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Department remain closed to all.

Still not allowed to operate are youth programs, but the Navajo Health Command Operations Center is reviewing the possible reopening of these programs.

Gymnasiums, recreation facilities and movie theaters are not allowed to operate at this time.

The public health order from May 21 is available on the Navajo Department of Health's website for COVID-19 and the tribe's reopening plan is available at [www.navajoreopening.navajo-nsn.gov](http://www.navajoreopening.navajo-nsn.gov).

A well-known flea market is in Sheep Springs, which was closed last March by its operators, the Tooh Haltsoo Council of Naataanii, because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Chapter Manager Kevin Begay explained that the chapter government was leasing the location that housed the flea market from the Regional Business Development Office under the tribe's Division of Economic Development.

Begay said he will contact the Regional Business Development Office in Shiprock about reapplying for the lease, then present the information to chapter officials about resuming the flea market.

"It would be nice to return because it was generating some revenue for us," Begay said adding that community members sold items like food for income.

The public health emergency order mentioned that while daily reports of new COVID-19 infection remain low, variants have been found, including those first detected in the United Kingdom, California and Brazil.

According to a May 10 report by the Navajo Epidemiology Center, there have been 21 cases of the strain detected in the UK identified in the Chinle, Gallup, Shiprock and Tuba City service units under the Navajo Area Indian Health Service.

The epidemiology center's report states the Utah Navajo Health System Inc. had one case of the variant that originated in Brazil and the variant first detected in California has been found in cases from the Chinle, Gallup, Kayenta, Shiprock and Tuba City service units.

READ MORE AT: <https://www.daily-times.com/story/news/local/navajo-nation/2021/05/24/navajo-nation-covid-19-yellow-status-reopen-flea-roadside-market/7417350002/>



## Navajo Nation becomes largest tribe in US after pandemic saw climb in enrollment

The Navajo Nation has become the largest tribe in the U.S., as its enrollment climbed during the coronavirus pandemic.

The tribe's enrollment jumped from 306,268 to 399,494 in 2020, according to the Navajo Office of Vital Records and Identification, The New York Times reported.

The Navajo Nation, whose reservation is in Arizona, Utah and New Mexico, has surpassed the Cherokee Nation to become the biggest tribe in the U.S. The Cherokee Nation has an enrollment of around 392,000.

The Navajo Nation has some of the strictest requirements among tribes for joining, with official documentation showing a person is one-quarter Dine, the term many from the Navajo Nation prefer to call themselves, needed, NYT noted.

One reason enrollment has increased so much could be the tribe's COVID-19 relief payments; those who wished to reenroll or enroll for the first time would get a \$1,350 payment from the funds given to the tribe by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act if accepted, the Times reported.

The population of the Navajo Nation could be greater, as the Census Bureau has not released the 2020 population numbers for the tribe.



The Navajo Nation president in recent weeks has come out against Arizona's new voting laws, saying they're an "assault" on the tribe's voting rights.

Read more at: <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/554910-navajo-nation-becomes-largest-tribe-in-us-after-pandemic-saw>

## PERSONNEL NEWS -- DCD OPEN POSITIONS

POSITION TITLE	LOCATION	PAY RATE	CLOSING DATE
<b>Administrative Service Centers</b>			
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Red Lake, AZ	26,726.40	OUF
Community Services Coordinator (S)	Rock Springs, NM	37,709.28	OUF
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Tsayatoh, NM	26,726.40	06/14/2021
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Rock Springs, NM	26,726.40	06/14/2021
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Forest Lake, AZ	26,726.40	OUF
Community Services Coordinator (S)	Hardrock, AZ	37,709.28	OUF
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Alamo, NM	26,726.40	OUF
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Cudei, NM	26,726.40	06/14/2021
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Kaibeto, AZ	26,726.40	OUF
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Coalmine Mesa, AZ	26,726.40	OUF
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Navajo Mountain, AZ	26,726.40	OUF
Community Services Coordinator (S)	Cameron, AZ	37,709.28	06/09/2021
Community Services Coordinator (S)	Coalmine Mesa, AZ	37,709.28	06/09/2021
Community Services Coordinator (S)	Coppermine, AZ	37,709.28	06/09/2021

(OUF) Open Until Filled

(S) Sensitive Position (subject to background check)

Closing Dates may change due temporary reduction in non-essential Navajo Nation government services

For the most up-to-date personnel info, please visit DPM's website at  
<http://www.dpm.navajo-nsn.gov/jobs.html>

## Comic of the Month

TIPS FOR RETURNING TO  
WORK AFTER VACATION

1. DOUBLE-CHECK YOUR ALARM CLOCK.
2. GET TO WORK A LITTLE EARLY TO CATCH-UP ON E-MAILS.
3. PRETEND YOU REMEMBER HOW TO DO YOUR JOB.



Facebook.com/FowlLanguageComics FowlLanguageComics.com ©Brian Gordon

## Inspirational Quote of the Month

**"Don't be distracted by criticism.**

**Remember--the only taste of success some people get is to take a bite out of you."**

**-- Zig Ziglar**



# Navajo Nation Census Information Center News

## Memorial Day: May 31, 2021

MAY 31, 2021

RELEASE NUMBER CB21-SFS-071

**Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who died in service to their country. The holiday was officially proclaimed in 1868 to honor Union and Confederate soldiers and was expanded after World War I to honor those who died in all wars. Today, Memorial Day honors over 1 million men and women who have died in military service since the Civil War began in 1861.**

**From The American Presidency Project, Proclamation 4056—Prayer for Peace, Memorial Day, 1971: "It is a simple matter to make war, and a difficult matter to make a peace. The history of man confirms this, for it records few periods when men have not somewhere in the world waged war on their fellow men. Confirmed in this truth, we know that our concern in America must be to move hand in hand with men of all nations to make the world safe for humanity. In this manner we can insure that those who died for us did not die in vain, that out of war has come redemption, and out of the search for redemption has come a true and just and lasting peace."**

READ MORE AT: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/memorial-day.html>

United States™  
**Census**  
Bureau

## HOW DO WE KNOW?

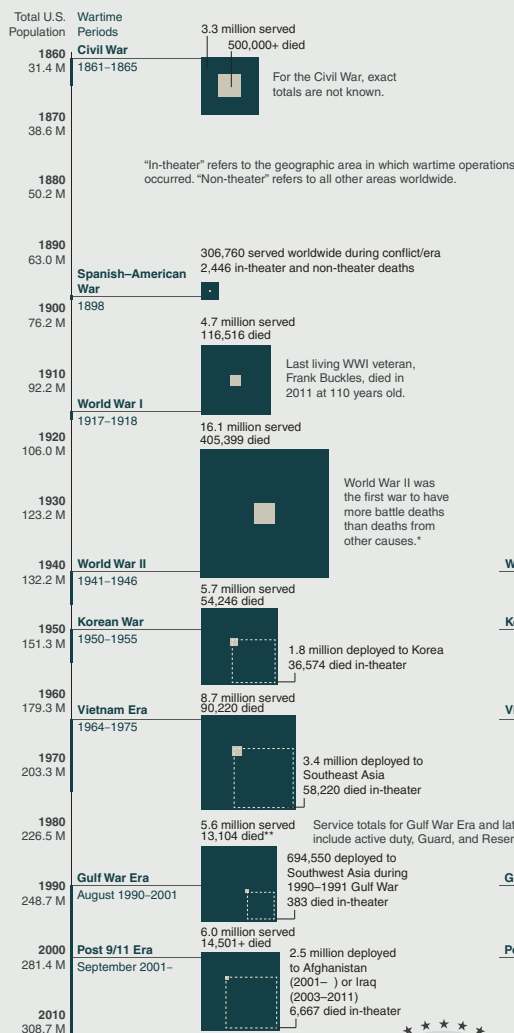
### MEMORIAL DAY

Honoring America's Wartime Veterans

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who died in service to their country. The holiday was officially proclaimed in 1868 to honor Union and Confederate soldiers and was expanded after World War I to honor those who died in all wars. Today, Memorial Day honors over one million men and women who have died in military service since the Civil War.

This infographic compiles statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and Department of Defense to honor our men and

women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. The U.S. Census Bureau gathers detailed information on living veterans from the American Community Survey (ACS). Federal, state, and community leaders, private businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations use ACS statistics to determine the programs, services, and infrastructure that serve the needs of our veterans. The Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center provides statistics on the number of people who served and died in each of our nation's wars.



#### Wartime Periods Notes:

\* Deaths include battle deaths (for "in-theater" only), accidents, illness, injury, or other causes.

\*\* Death totals include only active duty between 1990 and 2001.

Wartime periods show official dates of U.S. involvement. Population totals include the territories of Alaska and Hawaii from 1890 to 1950.

#### Congressional Medal of Honor

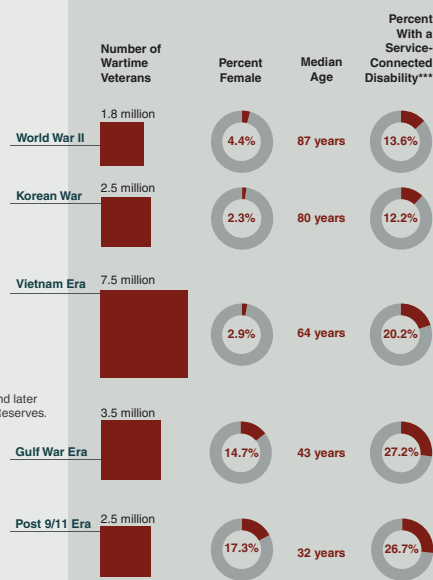
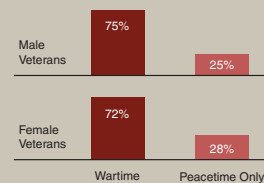
3,460 men and 1 woman have received the Medal of Honor, the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force

#### Wartime Veterans in 2011

Source: 2011 American Community Survey

16.1  
MILLION

of the 21.6 million living veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces served worldwide on active duty during a period of war



#### 2011 ACS Notes:

Data from the ACS include the veteran population 18 years and older who live in the United States and Puerto Rico.

Periods of military service are not mutually exclusive. Veterans could have served in multiple periods.

\*\*\* "Service-connected" means the disability was a result of disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service.

The percentages of Gulf War and Post-9/11 veterans with a service-connected disability are not statistically different.

United States™  
**Census**  
Bureau

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

CENSUS.GOV  
#HowDoWeKnow

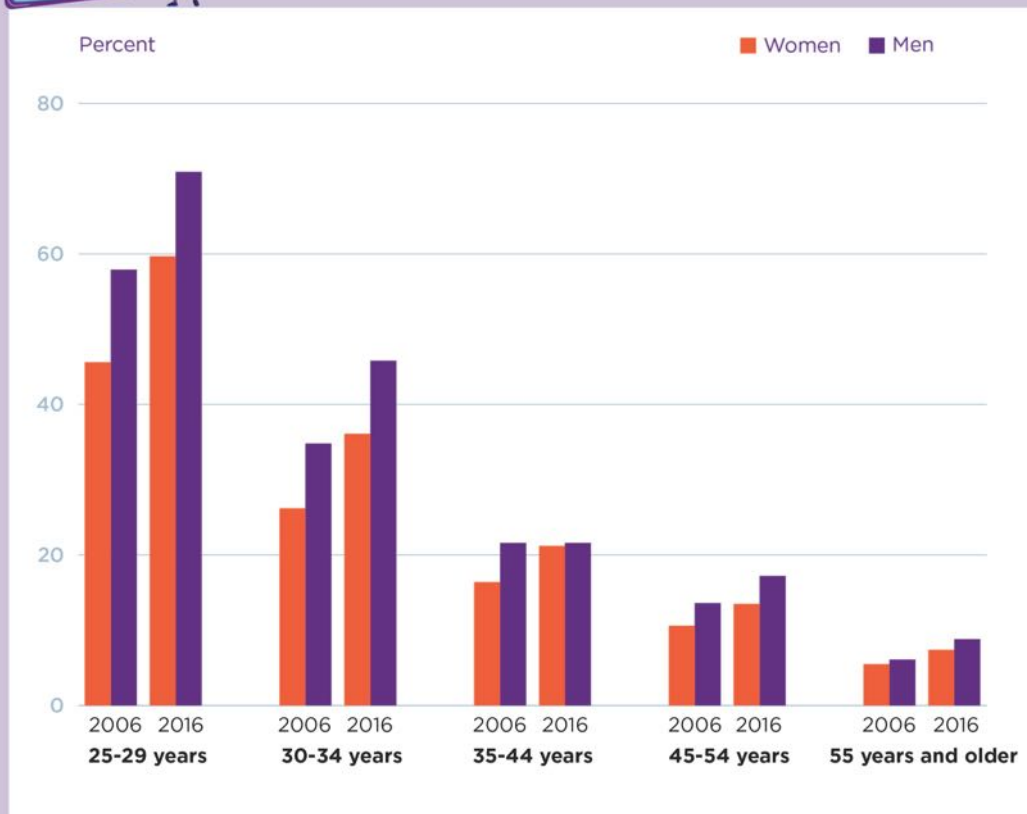


Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center and Defense Casualty Analysis System; Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Public Affairs.  
For more information, visit [www.census.gov/how/infographics/sources.html](http://www.census.gov/how/infographics/sources.html).



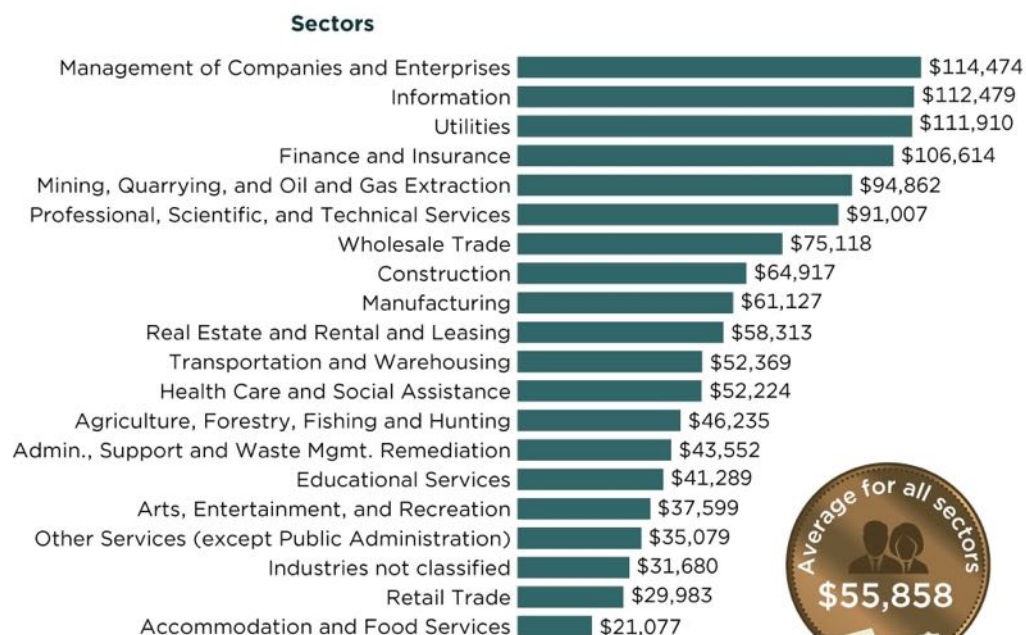
# Never Married on the Rise

Percentage of Never Married Adults by Sex and Age



## The BIG Paycheck

Average Annual Payroll Per Employee by Industry



Note: Rankings may vary slightly due to nonsampling error and disclosure avoidance methods used to protect the confidentiality of the data. Number of employees is for the pay period including March 12.







## Arizona Governor signs two voter suppression bills that disproportionately impact Navajo voters

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer express their disappointment with Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey's recent actions of signing S.B. 1003 and S.B. 1485 into law. These bills work to suppress voters from the state's 22 tribes, including the Navajo Nation.

Last Friday, Gov. Ducey signed S.B. 1003 into law, which drastically reduces the timeframe to cure missing signatures on mail-in ballots, allowing only up to 7:00 p.m. on an election day to do so. If the missing signature is not received by the deadline, the ballot will not be counted. The measure was approved by the Arizona State Legislature despite opposition from Arizona tribes, voting rights groups, and others.

"The actions of certain state lawmakers and Gov. Ducey is belittling to all 22 Arizona tribes. Their failure to listen to tribes and understand the unique challenges we face when it comes to voter registration and access to voting sites will have disproportionate impacts on Native American people. As the executive head of the state, Gov. Ducey has a duty to protect the voting rights of all Arizona citizens, including Native Americans. There are many Native American voters who drive hours and hundreds of miles on election day to cast their ballots and many face language barriers once they get there – these are just a few of the challenges. Gov. Ducey is either unaware of these issues or chooses to ignore them in the face of national political pressure. As leaders, we have to do better and stand up for the voting rights of all people," said President Nez.

S.B. 1003 directly undermines the settlement the Navajo Nation reached in 2019 with the Arizona Secretary of State Office and Arizona Counties, in which the state agreed to allow Navajo voters with mismatched or missing signatures on mail-in ballots five business days after election day to correct their ballot. Under S.B. 1003 Navajo voters with mismatched signatures will continue to have 5 business days to correct their ballot but Navajo voters with missing signatures will only have until 7:00 p.m. on Election Day.

On Tuesday, Gov. Ducey signed S.B. 1485 into law, removing approximately 150,000 current registered voters from the permanent early voter list if they have not voted in two consecutive primary and general elections.

"The voting power of the Navajo people changed the outcome of the 2020 election in the state of Arizona and certain groups did not like it. It's voter suppression, it's voter disenfranchisement, and it's an unprecedented attack on our right to vote. We have to stand together and push back on these voting measures that are clearly designed to favor certain groups," added President Nez.

The Navajo Nation continues to oppose another bill, Senate Bill 1713, which would require individuals to provide a date of birth and driver's license number or voter registration number in order to vote by mail. Many Navajo citizens, especially the elderly, have challenges obtaining a driver's license. The law does not make any provision for Tribal Census or Tribal IDs, which are considered valid forms of identification for voting purposes in the state of Arizona. In addition, finding a person's voter registration number is very difficult for most people. The proposed law would also require that ballots be thrown out if a number is not legible or written incorrectly.

"S.B. 1713 will work to deny Navajo voters the ability to vote by mail-in ballot. In contrast to a majority of Arizona citizens, Navajo people live in extremely rural conditions. For Navajo voters, the physical vastness and rural settings of the Nation create unique challenges for Navajo citizens in casting their ballots in state and federal elections. These circumstances coupled with lower income levels and language barriers makes voting a challenging task for many Navajo citizens. The requirement of adding additional identification that Navajo voters may not readily have on hand, adds a measure of difficulty to mail-in ballots," said Vice President Lizer.

READ MORE AT: <https://www.navajo-nsn.gov/News%20Releases/OPVP/2021/May/FOR%20IMMEDIATE%20RELEASE%20-%20Arizona%20Governor%20signs%20two%20voter%20suppression%20bills%20that%20disproportionately%20impact%20Navajo%20voters.pdf>



## Navajo Nation Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19 (COVID-19)



Last Updated: May 27, 2021

## Navajo Nation Residents

Total Confirmed Cases<sup>1</sup>

30,815

New Cases from Last Update: 3

Total Recovered<sup>4</sup>

29,436

Total Confirmed Deaths<sup>5</sup>

1,318

Death(s) Reported: 0

Total Tests Completed<sup>2</sup>

273,370

Total Positive Tests<sup>3</sup>

39,286

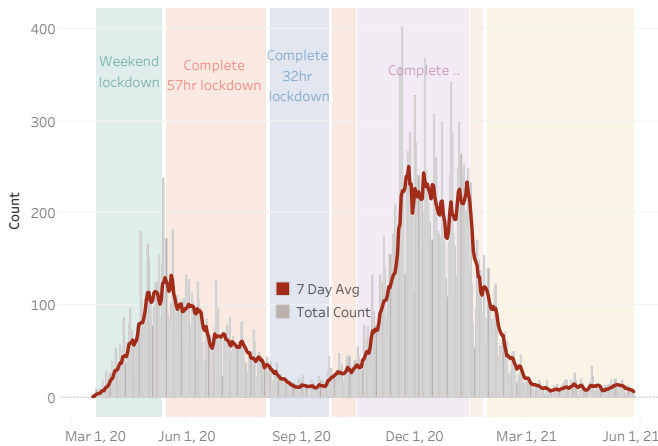
Total Negative Tests

222,008

## Service Area Confirmed Cases

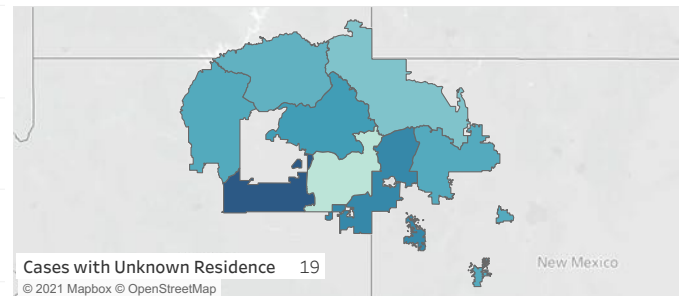
Bordertown	Chinle	Crownpoint	Fort Defiance	Gallup	Kayenta	Shiprock	Tuba City	Winslow
8,628	5,596	2,961	3,668	4,891	2,734	5,222	3,738	1,986

## Daily Confirmed Cases on Navajo Nation in All



## Navajo Nation Service Area Rates per 10,000 population

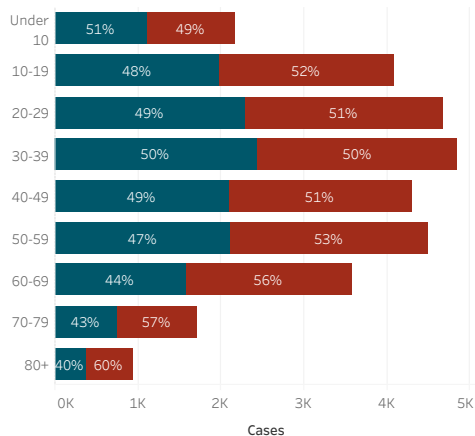
1,573.0 2,462.5



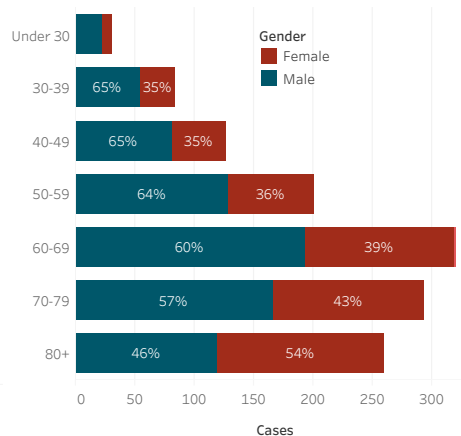
\*\*Map reflects estimates on the total number of cases by population area since March 2020, NOT the number of cases in the past 7 or 14 days as presented in Gating Criteria. This map does not reflect current risk levels.

\*Click on service area to display more information. Click outside service area to display Navajo Nation information. Ramah is included with Gallup service area and Alamo, Tohajiilee are included with Crownpoint service area.

## COVID-19 by Age Groups



## COVID-19 Deaths by Age Groups

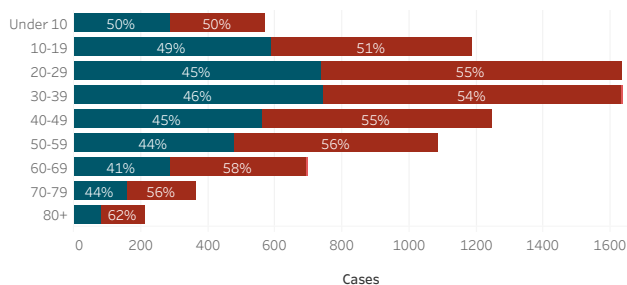


## COVID-19 Cases attributed to Variant of Concern (VOC)

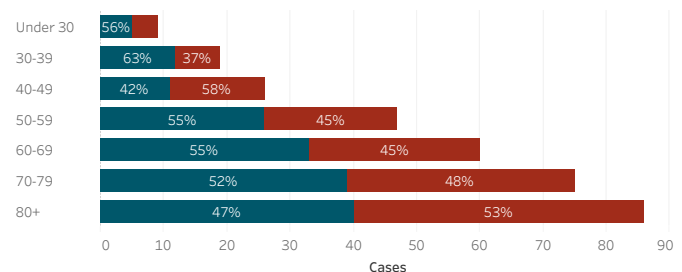
Number of samples successfully sequenced 120

B.1.1.7 - UK/England	38
B.1.351 - South Africa	0
B.1.427/429 - California	18
P.1 - Brazil	2

## Bordertown COVID-19 by Age Groups



## Bordertown COVID-19 Deaths by Ages Groups



<sup>1</sup> Some Cases are due to delayed reporting



# WHY A FACEMASK?

## FOR PREVENTING COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

**Navajo Nation Public Health Emergency  
Order 2020-007 (Effective April 17, 2020)**

Requiring all individuals (2 years old and older) on the Navajo Nation to wear protective masks in public to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Mask is a covering designed to filter one's breathing through both the nose and mouth. A mask must snugly cover the face and around the nose and mouth to prevent the wearer from breathing unfiltered air. Mask can be commercially-made or a homemade cloth face covering.

- Remember to stay 6 feet apart from others in public.
- Public means any area outside your home.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds/or sanitize your hands.
- Avoid touching high-touch surfaces in public.
- Wear gloves/use tissue/use t-shirt sleeves to cover your hands or fingers if you touch something.
- Clean and disinfect purchased food and household items.
- Clean and disinfect your home and vehicles to remove germs.
- Only one person in the household should make a trip for food/household necessities.



# STAY HOME



Navajo Health Command Operation Center  
Phone: 928.871.7014  
Info Email: [coronavirus.info@nndoh.org](mailto:coronavirus.info@nndoh.org)

[www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19](http://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19)

## #DineDabidziil

May 2021



The DCD Newsletter, "Community Info", is produced monthly by the Division of Community Development and is a resource for division staff and chapters.

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