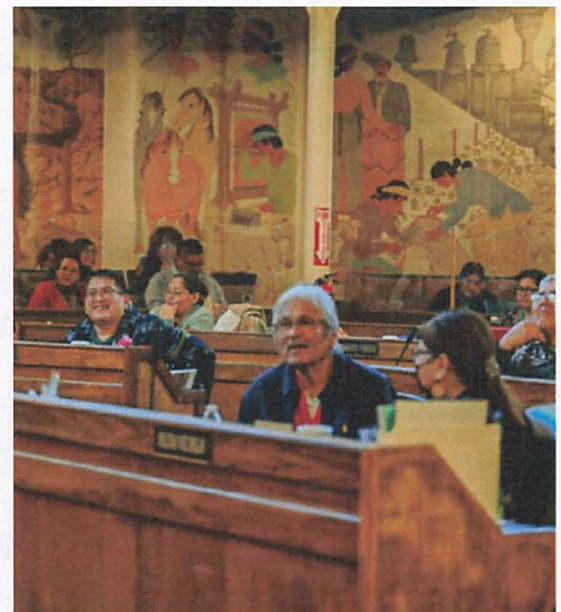


SPEAKER'S REPORT

**SPEAKER CRYSTALYNE CURLEY
25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL**



**CENTRAL NAVAJO AGENCY COUNCIL
MANY FARMS CHAPTER
APRIL 5, 2025**



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COUNCIL REAFFIRMS TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY AND GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The 25th Navajo Nation Council stands firm in its assertion of the Navajo Nation's sovereignty and the unique, government-to-government relationship between tribal nations and the federal government. In response to the recent Executive Orders issued by President Trump related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), the Council emphasizes that tribal nations are not mere racial classifications but distinct, sovereign governments that entered into treaties with the United States.

"The Navajo Nation, like many federally recognized tribes, is grounded in treaties that affirm our status as a political entity with inherent rights and responsibilities. These treaties and agreements establish a sacred trust, and the federal government has a constitutional obligation to uphold these commitments. The fulfillment of this trust responsibility is essential to our people's well-being," said Speaker Crystalyne Curley of the 25th Navajo Nation Council.

The 1868 Navajo Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Bosque Redondo, recognized the Navajo Nation's authority to govern itself, establish laws, and choose its leaders. It became a cornerstone for protecting and sustaining Navajo culture, governance, and identity.

In this context, the Navajo Nation reaffirms its call for meaningful consultation on all matters impacting the tribe, consistent with the federal government's obligation to uphold a true nation-to-nation relationship. The 25th Navajo Nation Council urges the Trump Administration to respect the sovereignty of the Navajo Nation, and to ensure that tribal interests are protected within the broader policy framework.

This administration's focus on the DEI Executive Orders must not diminish or mischaracterize tribal nations' political and legal status. The Navajo Nation has worked tirelessly to strengthen its governance and the trust relationship with the federal government, and the Council reaffirms its unwavering commitment to this path. As sovereign nations, the Navajo people are not a subject of racial or ethnic categorization, but rather, distinct and autonomous political entities with the right to self-determination.

The recent executive orders, including the shutdown of the Department of Education, could have a profound impact on the Navajo Nation, particularly in relation to the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Under the Department of the Interior, the BIE administers crucial education programs and funding for Navajo students, including grants for K-12 education, higher education, and special needs services. A shift or closure of the Department of Education could disrupt these essential services, putting at risk the educational resources that support Navajo schools and communities. It is critical that the federal government consults with tribal nations to ensure these vital educational programs continue uninterrupted and that the Navajo Nation's treaty rights and sovereignty are upheld.

The tribal sovereignty of the Navajo Nation stands as a reminder to the federal government of its responsibility to honor and fulfill its treaty obligations. The 25th Navajo Nation Council remains steadfast in its commitment to the protection and advancement of the rights of the Navajo people and all Native American communities.

NAABIK'ÍYÁTI' COMMITTEE PASSES LEGISLATION URGING U.S. GOVERNMENT TO UPHOLD TRUST OBLIGATIONS IN TRIBAL EDUCATION POLICIES

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Thursday, March 27, the Naabik'íyáti' Committee of the 25th Navajo Nation Council passed Legislation No. 0028-25, urging the United States government to honor its trust and treaty obligations by consulting with the Navajo Nation before implementing policies or executive actions that affect tribal education.

This legislation directly responds to a February 14 memorandum issued by the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office for Civil Rights. The letter, signed by Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Craig Trainor, cautioned that federally funded educational institutions may risk losing federal funding if they engage in race-based practices, including affirmative action and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

"Acting Assistant Secretary Trainor's memo creates uncertainty for programs that are vital to our students," said Delegate Tolth. "This legislation is about protecting our treaty rights and ensuring that Navajo students are not left behind due to a misunderstanding of our political identity."

The Committee expressed concerns that the letter fails to recognize the political, rather than racial, status of federally recognized tribes.

The legislation reaffirms that educational programs serving Navajo and other American Indian and Alaska Native students do not fall under the racial classifications outlined in the Department's guidance. Categorizing them as such would undermine tribal sovereignty and disregard the unique legal relationship between tribal nations and the United States.

The Naabik'íyáti' Committee emphasized that Native American tribes are not simply ethnic or racial groups but political entities recognized through a government-to-government relationship with the federal government. The resolution cites foundational treaties between the U.S. and the Navajo Nation, specifically the Treaties of 1849 and 1868, as legal grounds for federal obligations to provide educational funding and services.

These obligations are further supported by Supreme Court precedent, including the 1974 *Morton v. Mancari* case, which ruled that preferences for tribal citizens in federal programs are based on political, not racial, classifications.

"The failure to include this distinction in the ED's guidance risks the misapplication of civil rights law to tribal programs and could jeopardize educational resources for our youth," Delegate Tolth added.

The legislation also addresses concerns over the potential impact on tribal scholarship programs, particularly those administered by the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance. These programs provide essential financial support exclusively to enrolled members of the Navajo Nation.

The ED's accompanying FAQ notes that race-restricted scholarships may not be advertised or administered by educational institutions. This stipulation could interfere with the administration of tribal aid programs at colleges and universities.

In response, the Navajo Nation formally requests tribal consultation with the Department of Education to clarify the implications of its February 14 letter and ensure that future policies respect the sovereign status of Indian tribes. The Nation also urges the federal government and its agencies to reaffirm their commitment to honoring all treaty and trust responsibilities.

Delegate Dr. Andy Nez introduced a directive calling for a leadership meeting to address the Navajo Nation's response to President Trump's recent executive orders and memorandums.

The Committee unanimously passed the directive requesting the Office of the President and Vice President, the Office of the Speaker, and the Navajo Nation Washington Office to cooperatively schedule a meeting no later than April 10, 2025.

The Naabik'íyáti' Committee passed Legislation No. 0028-25 unanimously with a vote of nine in favor and none opposed. Final authority for the legislation rests with the Naabik'íyáti' Committee.



Council Delegate George Tolth sponsored Legislation No. 0028-25, urging the United States government to honor its trust and treaty obligations

COUNCIL MEMBERS ADDRESS CONCERNS WITH U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S LEGAL INTERPRETATIONS AT UNM TOWN HALL

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — 25th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley and Council Delegate Andy Nez participated in a town hall with ethnic studies academic leaders, students, and elected leaders to address a Feb. 14 letter issued by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which cautioned that federally funded educational institutions may risk losing funding if they engage in race-based practices, including affirmative action and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

The town hall was hosted by faculty from the University of New Mexico's (UNM) Ethnic Studies and Community Town Hall Planning Committee on March 29, to weigh the implications of the Feb. 14 letter that outlined the U.S. Department of Education's interpretations of Title IV of the Civil Rights Act, the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution, and other relevant authorities. The letter advised that relying on race, color, or national origin for education programs and admission into academic institutions is a violation of federal law.

Speaker Curley noted that the Council's Naabik'iyati Committee unanimously adopted resolution NABIMA-13-25 on March 27, reaffirming the political classification of the Navajo Nation as opposed to a racial classification that would fall under the DEI framework. The resolution also urges the federal government to consult with the Navajo Nation before implementing executive actions that affect education policies for tribes.

"Our ancestors battled not only hunger and poverty but also the darker forces of injustice that sought to erase our language, identity, and connection to the land," said Speaker Curley. "These forces return today in the form of policies that threaten our tribal sovereignty and existence. The federal government cannot undo the rights our ancestors fought to protect. We carry the strength and resilience they instilled in us, and though I do not take this fight lightly, I know we will prevail."

Speaker Curley also expressed a commitment to enhancing educational opportunities for all students while ensuring that DEI initiatives remain a central part of academic and campus life. She emphasized the importance of fostering inclusive environments that support both academic excellence and diversity.

Soon after the Department of Education issued its



Speaker Crystalyne Curley addressed a town hall held at UNM regarding the U.S. Department of Education's Dear Colleague letter.



Left to right: U.S. Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury, Speaker Crystalyne Curley, and Delegate Dr. Andy Nez.

letter, Delegate Andy Nez brought his concerns to the Council's Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC). In response, the Committee requested a legal analysis from the Navajo Nation Department of Justice and proceeded with legislation sponsored by Council Delegate George Tolth.

During the town hall, Delegate Nez emphasized the importance of continuing to educate federal officials about the unique political and legal status of tribes and working together to safeguard resources. He also noted that he would soon introduce legislation to address federal executive orders.

"The impacts will be felt doubly among our children and grandchildren," said Delegate Nez. "Leaders

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at the national level need to understand our unique status as tribes. That advocacy will continue among my colleagues. And for many, these are discussions that I encourage everyone to have at their dinner tables and in the classrooms because it affects us.”

Navajo Nation Vice President Richelle Montoya also spoke during the town hall, calling on students and advocates to remain strong and unified in their messaging and stance against divisive policies and legal interpretations.

U.S. Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury (D-NM) also spoke during the town hall and offered her strong support for diversity and DEI programs within universities. New Mexico Lt. Gov. Howie Morales,

New Mexico State Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero (D-Dist. 13), and UNM Senior Provost Dr. Barbara Rodriguez also offered their support during the event.

The town hall also featured public statements from numerous UNM students who shared their experiences and called for action to prevent the elimination of DEI programs and cultural initiatives at the university.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council thanks UNM’s Ethnic Studies and Community Town Hall Planning Committee, students, and supporters for hosting the town hall.

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL RESPONDS TO HHS RESTRUCTURING AND JOB CUTS

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - The 25th Navajo Nation Council expresses deep concern over the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) recent restructuring, which includes significant job cuts and agency consolidations. This decision, led by Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., raises serious questions about the federal government’s commitment to honoring its trust and treaty obligations to Native American tribes, including the Navajo Nation.

“Any federal policy impacting Native communities must be developed in full consultation with tribal nations, as required by law,” said Speaker Crystalyne Curley. “The 25th Navajo Nation Council will not stand idly by while policies are imposed without considering their impact on our people.”

The decision to lay off 10,000 HHS employees and merge critical agencies like the Health Resources and Services Administration and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration fails to account for the unique needs of tribal communities. These agencies provide essential services to Native populations, and their reduction could have severe consequences for the health and well-being of the Navajo people.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council has consistently emphasized that federal policies must not erode the rights of Native American citizens or disregard federal treaty obligations. Any action that weakens these services directly contradicts these legally binding agreements.

Furthermore, the Council is deeply concerned about how the restructuring will affect healthcare access, funding allocations, and public health initiatives serving Native communities. Many tribal nations already face significant disparities in healthcare, and cuts to HHS programs risk exacerbating these challenges. The impact on agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) raises further concerns about the continuation of critical research and disease prevention efforts affecting Native populations.

Similar to the Department of Education’s recent guidance, which mischaracterized Native American tribes as racial groups rather than sovereign political entities, this restructuring effort disregards the government-to-government relationship between tribes and the federal government.

“The Navajo Nation already faces significant challenges due to the federal hiring freeze, particularly within the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE),” Speaker Curley said. “Further reductions in HHS resources will not only deepen existing disparities but also undermine the well-being of Native communities and the nation as a whole.”

The 25th Navajo Nation Council urges the Department of Health and Human Services to engage in meaningful dialogue with tribal leaders to ensure that Native American healthcare remains a federal priority.

NAVIGATING THE IMPACTS OF THE U.S. ED'S DEAR COLLEAGUE LETTER ON NATIVE EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, D.C.- Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council met with U.S. Department of Education (ED) Office of Civil Rights Deputy Assistant Secretary Steven Schaefer to address concerns regarding the impact of the DOED's Dear Colleague letter on Native American students, among other federal education funding concerns.

The memorandum, issued on February 14 by Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Craig Trainor, warns federally funded universities that affirmative action and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives could put their funding at risk.

The delegates emphasized that Native American tribes are not simply racial groups but are recognized as political entities with a unique government-to-government relationship with the federal government. They highlighted the importance of preserving this sovereignty and ensuring that federal policies, such as those outlined in the Dear Colleague letter and DEI initiatives, do not undermine the rights and interests of Native American students and communities.

Speaker Crystalyne Curley raised concerns about how the Dear Colleague letter could affect tribal scholarship programs, particularly those administered by the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance, which provides financial aid exclusively to enrolled Navajo Nation members. The FAQ document issued by the Department of Education alongside the letter indicates that scholarships restricted by race may not be advertised or administered by colleges and universities.

"There is a significant concern that tuition offices might misinterpret this guidance and become reluctant to accept Navajo Nation scholarships, which would have a serious impact on Navajo students," Speaker Curley said.

Speaker Curley noted that the aftermath of these federal actions has created significant uncertainty, making it necessary for the ED to provide clear guidance to schools and students.

Council delegates underscored that the lack of direct consultation with tribes violates policy changes requiring government agencies to engage with Native nations before implementing policies



Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council Washington Office met with ED Deputy Assistant Secretary Steven Schaefer.

that affect them.

Council Delegate Carl Slater addressed the broader implications of these changes, particularly their effect on Native American history, language, and culture classes in state-funded schools, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) institutions, and higher education. He warned that limiting these subjects diminishes the education of not only Indigenous students but also non-Native students who need to learn the accurate history of Native peoples in the United States.

"The repercussions extend beyond graduation ceremonies. These changes risk minimizing Native curricula and erasing crucial aspects of the Native history of this country from education systems," Slater stated, calling for a commitment from the ED to ensure that these educational programs remain protected.

Council Delegate Cherilyn Yazzie pointed out that many Native students live outside their tribal nations and attend a mix of BIE, public, and 638 contract schools, all of which are experiencing disruptions. "Concerns over school closures and uncertainty around federal funding allocation add to the growing anxiety among students and educators," she said. "Without clear guidance, schools and tribes are left in the dark about how to manage these changes."

Deputy Assistant Secretary Schaefer acknowledged these concerns and committed to relaying them

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to his colleagues within the ED. He assured the tribal leaders that the office remains dedicated to upholding Title VI protections in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, against discrimination based on race, national origin, and shared ancestry, as well as Title IX and Section 504 protections included in the Education Amendments of 1972 for students with disabilities.

Speaker Curley urged the ED to reaffirm its commitment to Indigenous education, emphasizing

that the restructuring of the BIE, changes to funding streams, and potential school closures all require government to government consultation, federal guidance, and assurances that Native students will not be left behind.

"We need ongoing communication and proactive steps to safeguard the educational prosperity of our Native American students," Speaker Curley said. "Tribes must be involved in the decisions that directly impact their students and communities."

NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL CALLS FOR CONTINUED RECOGNITION OF CODE TALKERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

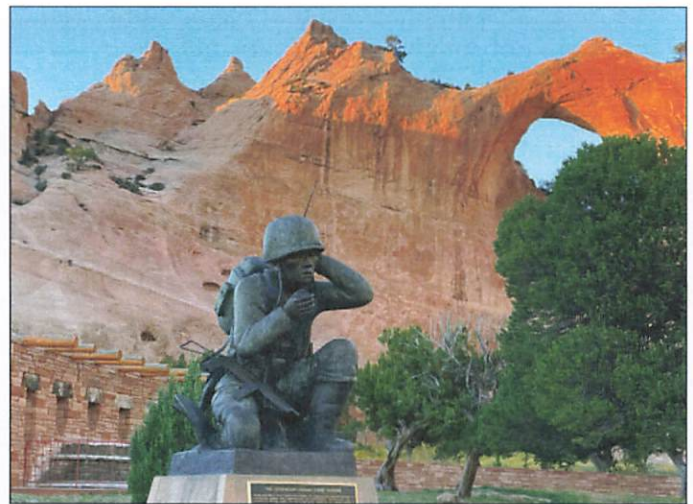
WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The 25th Navajo Nation Council expresses strong disappointment in the recent White House decision to remove articles acknowledging the Navajo Code Talkers military contributions from U.S. military websites. This action stems from recent White House Executive Orders aimed at terminating 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' (DEI) policies across all federally funded agencies.

"The service of the Navajo Code Talkers secured victory in the Battle of Iwo Jima and in World War II. The Navajo Code Talkers earned their place in history through their courage and sacrifice, giving their lives in defense of this nation," said Speaker Crystalyne Curley. "Erasing their extraordinary contributions from formal military history is not only disrespectful, it is dishonorable."

The Navajo Code Talkers saved countless lives by developing an unbreakable code, ensuring the secure transmission of vital military communications. Their bravery and ingenuity were instrumental in securing the United States' future.

On the implementation of the White House's DEI Executive Order, Speaker Curley emphasized that the Navajo Nation is not a racial group, but a distinct political entity. The Nation's relationship with the federal government is grounded in treaties and federal trust responsibilities, not in racial categorization.

"The Navajo Nation Council is deeply concerned by being conflated into DEI initiatives that fail to recognize our unique political status," said Speaker Curley.



The Navajo Nation Council will continue to honor the Navajo Code Talkers' vital role in shaping the outcome of World War II.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council is actively engaging with the administration to seek clarity on the reasoning behind the removal of articles recognizing the Code Talkers and other Indigenous military contributions.

"The United States would not be the nation it is today without the bravery and service of the Navajo Nation Code Talkers. Their legacy is a cornerstone of American history, and it is essential that their contributions be honored and recognized, not just in military history, but as an enduring symbol of sacrifice and service that shaped the very future of this country," said Speaker Curley.

The Navajo Nation Council will continue to honor the Navajo Code Talkers' vital role in shaping the outcome of World War II.

BUDGET AND FINANCE COMMITTEE RECEIVES FISCAL YEAR 2026 REVENUE PROJECTION

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Monday, March 31, the Budget and Finance Committee (BFC) received a report from Controller Sean McCabe outlining the Fiscal Year 2026 (FY2026) Revenue Projection and additional information from Speaker Crystalyne Curley and Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne regarding their budget priorities.

BFC Chair Shaandiin Parrish stated that the FY2026 Revenue Projections must be presented to the Three Branch Chiefs by the end of the second quarter of each fiscal year, which was Monday, March 31.

"The projection provides data on revenue fluctuations from Navajo Nation enterprises and royalties," said Chair Parrish. "It helps the Committee assess future allocations to maximize returns while strengthening direct services and community priorities."

Controller McCabe reported that the FY2026 projection includes revenues from seven areas: oil and gas, coal, taxes, investment income, land rentals (including rights-of-way and business site leases), court fines and fees, and miscellaneous sources.

According to McCabe, the FY2026 Revenue Projection stands at \$285 million, with mandated annual set-asides projected at \$73.5 million.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty inquired whether the projections were based on previous years' estimates or actual audited data. McCabe clarified that figures from 2020 to 2023 reflect audited actual revenues, 2024 numbers are still being audited, and 2025 is a projection based on first-quarter data.

The BFC also received updates on the FY2026 budgeting process from two Branch Chiefs. Although all Three Branch Chiefs were invited, only Speaker Curley and Chief Justice Jayne attended.

On Tuesday, Speaker Curley met with each of the Legislative Branch programs to assess their priorities and help develop a budget focused on direct



During the Budget and Finance Committee meeting, Speaker Crystalyne Curley identified key priorities in the Legislative Branch budget.

services. She identified key priorities, including additional attorneys at the Office of Legislative Counsel to assist with the legislative process, improvements to election operations, financial, revenue replacement, and energy advisors, as well as public outreach and intergovernmental relations.

Due to declining tax revenues and new revenue sources, the Council and BFC continue to prioritize the budget process to reassess fixed costs, prioritize personnel expenses, and advocate for community-level capital projects over centralized ones.

"Essential services must continue to remain intact considering any possible continuing resolution. Local capital projects should take precedence until revenue growth is assured," Speaker Curley said.

Chief Justice Jayne reported meeting with Administrative Office of the Courts Director Bennie Francisco to explore financial projections and data-driven budget solutions benefiting the Navajo people.

The BFC approved the report from Controller McCabe, Speaker Curley, and Chief Justice Jayne with a unanimous 5-0 vote.

BUDGET AND FINANCE COMMITTEE HOLDS WORK SESSION TO ADDRESS AMENDMENTS TO BUDGET INSTRUCTION MANUAL

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - On Monday, March 24, the Budget and Finance Committee (BFC) held a work session to discuss proposed amendments to the Budget Instruction Manual (BIM) in preparation for the Fiscal Year 2026 Comprehensive Budget formulation.

BFC Chair Shaandiin Parrish said that the goal of the session was to engage with all three branches of the Navajo Nation government to evaluate and consider amendments to the BIM.

"The work session served as an opportunity for various departments and branches to come together and engage in meaningful discussions aimed at improving the Nation's fiscal accountability," said Chair Parrish.

The Committee coordinated with Controller Sean McCabe in considering several key recommendations to enhance the BIM.

During the work session, the Office of the Controller (OOC) proposed aspects of a two-year budget model with more flexibility in the movement of funds within business units. These concepts included the transfer of funds between operating and personnel budgets and would require monthly reporting and quarterly reviews to ensure alignment with the overall budget. The Committee will consider these concepts as they address Title 12 amendments later this year.

While recommending increased flexibility, the Committee stressed that funds from one business unit should not be used to cover expenses in another. They emphasized that the transfer of funds from one business unit's budget should remain prohibited, and any additional funds needed should be requested through the quarterly review process.

In addition to these changes, the BFC highlighted the importance of enforcement provisions within the BIM. They recommended implementing clear consequences for violations, including possible disciplinary actions and termination for the misuse of public funds. The provisions should ensure that general funds are spent according to Navajo Nation accounting and procurement policies.

The Committee further recommended that the OOC develop similar enforcement measures within its accounting policies, including mechanisms for

reporting non-compliance to oversight committees and the Office of Ethics and Rules.

Additionally, the Committee proposed redefining fixed costs in the BIM to include essential operational expenses such as utilities, internet, and maintenance—fundamental costs necessary to sustain day-to-day operations.



The BFC received updates on the FY2026 budgeting process from the Legislative and Judicial Branches.

Finally, the BFC addressed the allocation of indirect costs. They recommended revisiting the distribution of these expenses to ensure they are not disproportionately applied to business units that are not included in the indirect cost pool within annual budget proposals.

Guided by the implementation of priorities gathered through the FY2025 Comprehensive Budget public hearings, the Committee looks to strengthen the policies that guide the Nation's budget formulation through additional work sessions. The work sessions serve as a guide for the Committee to consider recommendations as the BIM legislation comes before the BFC in April.

The BFC extends its gratitude to the OOC, Office of Management and Budget, and the Division of Community Development's Administrative Services Center for their insightful recommendations to the BIM.

The Budget and Finance Committee will schedule a second work session to address the BIM. Amendments can be sent to Budget and Finance Committee Legislative Advisor Rodney L. Tahe at rodneytahe@navajo-nsn.gov.

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL CELEBRATES NEW VEHICLES FOR THE DIVISION OF AGING AND LONG-TERM CARE SUPPORT

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Thursday, April 3, members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council joined the Navajo Department of Health's Division of Aging and Long-Term Care Support (DALTCS) and President Buu Nygren for a vehicle presentation ceremony at the Navajo Special Diabetes Wellness Center in Window Rock, Ariz.

The ceremony marked the acquisition of 25 new vehicles for the Navajo DALTCS program.

Funding for the vehicles was allocated through Resolution CMY-28-24, which designated over \$2 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) during a special session of the 25th Navajo Nation Council on May 28, 2024. Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren signed the resolution on June 17, 2024.

"I'd like to thank my colleagues for consistently prioritizing the needs of our elders and for allocating over \$2.2 million for the purchase of new vehicles for DALTCS," said Speaker Crystalyne Curley. "Through their wisdom and perseverance, our elders have forged a path for our continued existence and prosperity. The 25th Navajo Nation Council will continue to fund direct services that benefit our elders."

During the presentation, traditional practitioner Kenneth Begay from the Division of Behavioral and Mental Health Services conducted a traditional blessing and prayer to safeguard the new vehicles, designated drivers, and staff.

Following the blessing, the 25 vehicles were distributed to assigned drivers representing Senior Centers across all five Navajo Agencies.

NDOH Executive Director Sherylene Yazzie explained that the DALTCS program had purchased 25 new Jeep Wagoneers, which were delivered to Navajo Fleet Management and approved for distribution to assigned drivers by the Navajo Nation Motor Vehicle Review Board.

Council Delegates Helena Nez Begay, Casey Allen Johnson, Vince James, Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Otto Tso, and Speaker Curley attended the presentation alongside President Nygren.



Before the new vehicles were distributed to the assigned drivers, traditional practitioner Kenneth Begay conducted a prayer.

Council Delegate Otto Tso emphasized the role of elders in shaping future generations.

"Our elders shape us into the caring individuals we become as we grow older," said Delegate Tso. "They instill in us a deep respect for wisdom and experience, guiding us forward with their knowledge and strength."

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee Chair Vince James acknowledged the dedication of Navajo Senior Center staff, recognizing their commitment to caring for elders.

"I want to acknowledge each and every one of you," James said. "You put in a lot of miles traveling to your work sites, and you put a lot of wear and tear on your vehicles. Congratulations to all the Senior Centers receiving new vehicles."

The 25th Navajo Nation Council extends its gratitude to NDOH, DALTCS, OPVP, and everyone who contributed to the purchase of these new vehicles, which will greatly support Navajo elders.

RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ADVANCES STRATEGIC FUNDING PLAN FOR AGRICULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE FUND PROJECTS

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Monday, March 31, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) deliberated a report from Department of Agriculture Director Jesse Jim on the Year 3 Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) project. Jim presented a comprehensive report that outlined funding priorities, departmental expenditures, and necessary legislative amendments to meet the evolving agricultural needs.

"The AIF is funded by indemnities paid to the Nation through our Pasture, Rangeland, and Forage insurance policy," said RDC Chair Jesus. "The Committee diligently supports our ranchers and farmers strategically implementing projects that are vetted through grazing committees, land boards, and aligned with USDA guidelines."

The Committee supported Jim's recommendation for a revised allocation of \$5.6 million in AIF resources, which would be necessary to close out Year Three of the program and set the stage for a projected \$24.9 million in funding for Year Four.

Year Three originally faced a \$4 million deficit due to prior over-allocations and unapproved projects. However, with strategic cuts, consolidations, and a narrowing of the project scope to nine core initiatives, the funding now balances precisely at \$5.6 million.

"This adjustment zeroes us out for Year Three and puts us in a strong financial position moving forward," said Jesse Jim. "If we remained with the previously proposed \$9.2 million in unapproved projects, we would have been \$4 million in the red. This revised plan protects our financial integrity and honors USDA guidelines."

The newly approved Year Three portfolio focuses on high-impact initiatives, including:

- Navajo Tribal Ranchers Grazing and Supplemental Feeding Program
- Agricultural Education Outreach and Scholarships
- Reopening of the Crown Point Field Office
- Aerial Feral Livestock Management Program
- Farm and Garden Incentive Program
- Livestock Genetic Improvement and Wool/Mohair Initiatives
- Permit Probate Advertisement Assistance

According to Jim's report, the Department of Agriculture has received 82% of the approved \$25.5 million disbursed under Year Three. This includes \$14.1 million in incentive payments, \$5.2 million for



Resources and Development Committee deliberated a report from Agriculture Department Director Jesse Jim to assess Agriculture Infrastructure Fund projects.

departmental projects, and \$1.8 million in grants to local entities. Water Resources followed with 11%, while Fish and Wildlife, Forestry, and Historic Preservation shared the remaining 7%.

A significant 56.3% of funds were channeled into grazing and livestock support, highlighting the program's core priority. Farming and irrigation projects received 11.7%, while administrative costs and undefined "other" categories together consumed nearly 20%, raising concerns over classification transparency.

Chair Jesus recommended amending the original enabling legislation to reflect the new project list and appropriations. Council Delegate Danny Simpson supported the revised nine-project plan but emphasized the need to secure previously earmarked \$1 million for the Eastern Agency.

"I fully support reallocating the \$5.6 million. But I also want to make sure Eastern Agency doesn't get left behind. We need to include that \$850,000 in Year Four to honor previous commitments", said Delegate Danny Simpson.

Jim confirmed what the department will propose Year Four funding before September, aiming for implementation in 2026. She noted that significant groundwork remains, including amending the Fund Management Plan, which expired in 2023, and establishing formal project approval guidelines.

"We've inherited a program without clear protocols. Right now, we're building policies from scratch, based on past experiences, USDA standards, and the input from our grazing committees and local boards," she said.

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"It's encouraging to see new policies being created for project accountability. The groundwork has been laid for Year Four, and with feasibility studies complete, projects like hay development are ready to move forward", said Vice Chair Casey Allen Johnson.

One major limitation for future expansion includes land

withdrawal and design for agency-level agriculture centers, particularly in underserved regions like Western Agency.

The Resources and Development Committee voted four in favor with none opposed in approving the Department of Agriculture's report.

THE MISSING AND MURDERED DINÉ RELATIVES TASK FORCE RECEIVES REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DATABASE TO TRACK MISSING RELATIVES

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives (MMDR) Task Force and Navajo Technical University (NTU) are moving forward with an effort to build a centralized, secure, and survivor-centered data system.

The database will support efforts to track cases of missing and murdered Diné individuals—especially Diné women, girls, and LGBTQ and Two-Spirit relatives—who are severely affected by violence and underrepresented in official statistics.

"The database isn't just about compiling cases—it's about restoring visibility to those our systems have historically ignored," said Chairwoman Amber Kanazbah Crotty. "Our LGBTQ and Two-Spirit relatives must be counted. Their stories, identities, and safety matter just as much, and this system is being designed with that understanding at the core."

NTU Vice President of Operations Dr. Jason Arviso and consultant Dr. Gil Gonzales briefed the Task Force on the initial methodology, scope, and user design of the system. The development strategy includes extensive stakeholder engagement, a transparent build process, and close alignment with the Task Force's evaluation plan. The report was helping in determining the database's technical structure, user interface, and key data fields, including categories for gender identity and sexual orientation to ensure inclusivity.

The cloud-based database will provide a secure administrative access and a public reporting portal. The application is being developed to comply with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and other data privacy standards.

Dr. Gonzales emphasized that while the system is in its early design phase, it will support both quantitative and qualitative reporting. The platform is also expected to feature mobile accessibility and offline data collection options to ensure use in remote and underserved areas of the Navajo Nation.



Missing and Murdered Dine' Relative Task Force Chairwoman Amber Kanazbah Crotty receives updates about NTU database system.

To increase transparency, NTU and the Task Force plan to publish regular public reports explaining how data is collected, what information is included, and how that data will be used to support policy decisions, victim services, and prevention strategies. This will include updates in verbal and digital storytelling to help families and chapters understand the purpose and progress of the database.

The NTU team is currently outlining the list of data elements and technical infrastructure. Small-group collaboration will guide how the system handles sensitive variables and ensures protection for all users. LGBTQ and Two-Spirit communities will be engaged directly to help shape how their cases are represented and handled within the system.

This initiative is the culmination of advocacy from families and relatives, who have pushed for data-driven solutions to a crisis long overlooked by mainstream systems. The MMDR Task Force and NTU are committed to honoring that history and building a system grounded in accountability, visibility, and healing.

For more information about the MMDR initiative, visit the MMDR Task Force page on the 25th Navajo Nation Council's website.

HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE PASSES SCHOOL BOARD BACKGROUND CHECK EXTENSION LEGISLATION

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Monday, March 24, the Health, Education, and Human Services (HEHSC) Committee pass Legislation 0030-25, an action to uphold school governance while addressing compliance challenges. The resolution grants an additional 90-day extension for local school board members to complete mandatory criminal background checks, ensuring minimal disruption to educational operations across the Nation.

Legislation sponsor, HEHSC Chair Vince James emphasized the measure's urgency following recent school board elections and operational delays.

"This legislation gives us a path forward to stabilize school board operations while still respecting the integrity of the background check process," said James. "We must ensure our schools are functional, especially as we approach critical end-of-year events like graduations and summer school planning."

The required background check stems from HEHSC Resolution HEHSCD-11-22, passed during the 24th Navajo Nation Council, mandating all school board members to submit federal, state, and Navajo Nation background checks within 90 days of election. However, a lack of procedural clarity, limited infrastructure, and logistical delays have impeded full compliance.

Chair James added, "Many school board members are still uncertain where or how to submit background checks. The Department of Diné Education currently lacks a designated adjudicator, fingerprinting resources, or contracts with background processing entities."

During the committee meeting, Delegate Dr. Andy Nez opposed the resolution, emphasizing accountability among elected officials. "I respect the committees' effort to address this problem, but we shouldn't waive responsibility of elected officials, especially when it concerns our students," Nez said. "If you're seeking public office, timely background compliance is part of the duty."

Legal counsel Candice French clarified the resolution's implementation period: "The waiver is effective for 90 days from March 11, 2025—the date of the most recent school board election. If unamended, this sets an expiration date of June 9, 2025."



The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee passed legislation giving school board members 90 days to be in compliance with school background check requirements.

The legislation allows school board members without completed background checks to participate in off-campus meetings or via teleconference, enabling decision-making while maintaining student safety.

Delegate George Tolth voiced concern over the flexibility, "We need to stick to what was drafted. The school board knows their responsibilities, and meetings shouldn't be held far from the community they serve."

Helena Nez-Begay offered support, stating, "Required background checks take time—especially through the Nation. 90 days is already cutting it close. We need to ensure our boards can function, not leave them paralyzed."

HEHSC members reiterated that all school board members, including those appointed or elected amid school bias claims, are still required to complete federal, state, and tribal background checks. The extension is not a waiver of the requirement, but a temporary allowance to support school functionality while maintaining accountability.

As final authority, the Health, Education, and Human Services passed Legislation 0030-25 with a vote of three in favor and one opposed. The measure underscores the need for clarity in the enforcement of school board background check policies moving forward.

DINÉ ACTION PLAN ADVISORY GROUP GATHERS AT DINÉ COLLEGE FOR SPRING QUARTERLY MEETING

TSAILE, Ariz. — On March 20, the 25th Navajo Nation Council and the Diné Action Plan Advisory Group convened its two-day Spring Quarterly meeting at Diné College, reaffirming the Navajo Nation's unified commitment to healing, justice, and community resilience. The gathering brought together task force members, tribal leaders, community stakeholders, and agency representatives to assess ongoing efforts and chart next steps in the implementation of the Diné Action Plan (DAP).

The Diné Action Plan serves as the Navajo Nation's official strategic roadmap to reduce substance abuse, violence, and intergenerational trauma. It emphasizes culturally grounded, community-informed solutions anchored in the Diné core value of k'é—kinship and relational accountability.

"Our purpose here is clear. It's to heal and protect our people," said Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty, a longtime advocate for MMDR and a leading voice within the committee. "This work is by the people, for the people. It's grounded in our sacred teachings, and we must carry it forward with discipline and unity."

Throughout the event, traditional teachings were woven into planning sessions. One key objective was ensuring that all strategies remain grounded in the Diné way of life. This cultural integration is not symbolic, but essential, leaders emphasized.

"Our communities already hold the answers," said Germaine Simonson. "This committee exists to connect, amplify, and implement those solutions using our own cultural knowledge systems. Our goal is sustainable wellness; spiritually, mentally, and physically."

Task forces worked in breakout sessions to refine evaluation strategies, finalize logic models, and strengthen cross-sector partnerships. A core focus included enhancing crisis response systems, expanding public education campaigns, and strengthening support for traditional healers and cultural resources.

The quarterly session highlighted progress made across the plan's five priority areas: prevention and intervention; treatment and healing; law enforcement and justice; reentry and reintegration; and community empowerment.



The Diné Action Plan Spring Quarterly meeting hosted by Diné College brought together task force members, tribal leaders, community stakeholders, and agency representatives.

Task force members shared updates on cross-agency collaborations, expansion of youth-focused programs, integration of traditional healing practices, and new community-based treatment resources.

Participants also discussed performance benchmarks and the need for sustainable implementation structures. The advisory group emphasized transparency, cultural responsiveness, and community voice as key pillars moving forward.

"We're not just building programs, we're shaping the future of our governance and healing practices," said Delegate Cherilyn Yazzie. "This meeting was more than just an update; it was a reaffirmation of why we do this work."

Hosted at Diné College, leadership welcomed the advisory group, reinforcing the institution's role in building capacity for community wellness and self-determination.

The Diné Action Plan was formally adopted through Resolution CS-51-21, with broad support from the Health, Education and Human Services, Law and Order, and Naabik'íyáti' Committees of the Navajo Nation Council.

Its implementation is led by the DAP Task Force, a cross-sector coalition coordinating interdepartmental strategies and accountability. Looking ahead, the Advisory Group pledged to strengthen outreach, reinforce trauma-informed practices, and prioritize youth engagement.

As the meeting concluded, Crotty later added, "This work saves lives. We're not here for titles or credit. We're here because our families deserve more—and we're making sure they get it."

FY2025 COMPREHENSIVE BUDGET FOCUSES ON MEETING CRITICAL NEEDS OF THE NAVAJO PEOPLE

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - On March 14, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren signed Resolution CF-07-25, the Navajo Nation Fiscal Year 2025 comprehensive budget.

In his budget message, President Nygren expressed disappointment over cuts to the Office of the President and Vice President's budget. Despite his perspective, the Council prioritized essential services, including direct programs at both central and local levels, aimed at preventing layoffs and ensuring the budget met community needs.

"The FY2025 Comprehensive Budget was designed with a clear focus on meeting the critical needs of the Navajo people. Additionally, it allocated vital support for employees, Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency, Navajo Nation scholarship, the Navajo Chapter Veterans' Organization, Emergency Medical Services, and many others. I'd like to thank my colleagues for focusing on broader, critical priorities of the Nation," said Speaker Crystalyne Curley.

The FY2025 budget funded several key service areas, including:

- \$2 million for solid waste projects and community assistance for all 110 Navajo Nation Chapters.
- \$2 million for Navajo Scholarship and Financial Assistance.
- \$7.3 million for Emergency Medical Services for capital expenses, including specialized vehicles, defibrillators, and auto pulses.
- \$750,000 for advocate and victim services for the Utah Navajo Health System.
- \$568,180 for advocate and victim services for Victim Services of Northern Arizona.
- \$921,179 to replenish Summer Youth Employment Programs for chapters under the \$30,000 threshold.
- \$1.4 million for annual compensation increases for Navajo Nation employees, including step increases and bonuses.
- \$4.7 million for a 4% General Wage adjustment for Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Branch employees.
- \$1.4 million for excess annual leave forfeiture payouts.
- \$550,000 for Navajo Chapter Veterans' Organizations across all 110 Navajo Nation Chapters.

In response to President Nygren's claim that the proposed budget "starves" his office of resources, it is important to note that the OPVP's budget was increased by \$780,000 in FY2025, reflecting a nearly



Speaker Crystalyne Curley said that budgeting isn't about exerting power, "It's about accountability, transparency, and ensuring resources are allocated wisely and effectively."

20 percent increase. During the duration of his administration, the OPVP budget has increased by \$1.6 million, reflecting a 22 percent increase.

President Nygren initiated line-item vetoes that cut more than \$2 million from the Legislative Branch's budget, affecting critical services like attorneys, state lobbyists, and protective services.

In a previous memorandum that accompanied the FY2025 Continuing Resolution, President Nygren committed to reinstating \$2.7 million in line-item vetoes into the FY2025 Comprehensive Budget. However, he went back on his word by only reinstating \$720,000 of the vetoed funds.

"The people granted the Navajo Nation President line-item veto authority to improve fiscal responsibility and maintain a balance of power," said Speaker Curley. "But President Nygren continues to wield this power without rationale at the expense of crucial programs and initiatives that serve the Navajo people, and attorneys that serve Legislative Branch programs. Although, the Legislative Branch is challenged with the line-item vetoes it will not hinder us to push the Nation's priorities. It is important to stay focused on the issues at hand that impact our Nation, such as our water rights, ARPA projects, federal priorities and service delivery."

Throughout the budget process, the 25th Navajo Nation Council also ensured that the Nation would avoid employee layoffs, prioritizing job stability while maintaining essential services and financial responsibility.

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BFC Chair Shaandiin Parrish emphasized that the BFC prioritized addressing unmet needs identified during the public hearings for the FY2025 Comprehensive Budget. This included carefully evaluating the financial impacts of any increases on departments' or divisions' budgets that could affect direct services to the Navajo people. These hearings also marked the first opportunity in 30 years for the public to have a direct influence on the budgeting process.

By making strategic budgetary decisions, the Council has safeguarded critical programs while ensuring that government operations remain efficient and effective

for the people they serve.

"Budgeting isn't about exerting power; it's about accountability, transparency, and ensuring resources are allocated wisely and effectively," said Speaker Curley. "The Navajo Nation Council takes pride in the enactment of a Comprehensive Budget, guaranteeing the continued delivery of essential daily services. Our priority is to maintain financial stability for this fiscal year while also planning for Fiscal Year 2026 to ensure continued progress and service to our people."

RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE HEARS REPORT FOR NTUA'S SOLAR POWER PROJECTS

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Monday, March 17, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) deliberated a report from the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority's (NTUA) on solar energy projects. The report provided detailed information on the progress, economic impact, and challenges of several large-scale renewable energy projects across the Navajo Nation.

"The Navajo Nation has significant potential for solar energy development, and we must ensure these projects deliver real benefits to our communities," said RDC Chair Brenda Jesus. "While we commend NTUA's efforts, our role is to ensure transparency, efficiency, and community-centered decision-making in every stage of development."

NTUA presented updates on multiple solar projects across the Navajo Nation especially in Red Mesa, Kayenta, Cameron and Chinle. The report highlighted that these initiatives is projected to generate millions in revenue, created hundreds of jobs, and contributed to infrastructure improvements. However, the committee raised concerns about the extended project timelines, which now average 10-12 years due to interconnection delays and regulatory challenges.

Council Delegate Otto Tso expressed the need for a clear blueprint to guide future renewable energy projects. He emphasized that securing interconnection agreements should not become a bottleneck that prevents the Navajo Nation from fully capitalizing on its solar energy resources.

The committee also addressed the importance of community engagement. Council Delegate Danny Simpson underscored the necessity of involving

local chapters early in the decision-making process to ensure communities understand the benefits and implications of these projects. Delegate Simpson also discussed the potential for leveraging transmission rights as an additional revenue stream for the Navajo Nation.

Further discussions centered on the need to update legislation governing community benefits. RDC Vice Chair Casey Allen Johnson proposed strengthening provisions in the Energy Policy Act of 2013 to guarantee that solar projects provide direct and measurable advantages to Navajo communities. Vice Chair Johnson also debated whether a third-party organization such as United Way could help distribute community benefits in a more equitable manner.

In response to concerns about over-promising benefits, RDC members called for greater accountability from NTUA. The committee urged the utility to provide clearer, more realistic commitments regarding job creation, revenue generation, and infrastructure improvements.

As part of its next steps, the committee unanimously approved NTUA's report and initiated a motion to draft legislation expanding community benefits. RDC voted five in favor and zero opposed to accept the report from NTUA.

The RDC also scheduled a leadership meeting to outline a comprehensive framework for future solar projects and agreed to conduct site visits to the Red Mesa and Kayenta solar projects. Additionally, the Council Delegate Shawna Ann Claw requested NTUA to present updates at the Chinle Chapter to improve transparency and local support.

RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETS WITH USEPA ON URANIUM MINE CLEANUP EFFORTS

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz –The Resources and Development Committee (RDC) recently met with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to discuss uranium mine cleanup efforts across the Navajo Nation, focusing on concerns from Navajo leadership and communities about long-term contamination impacts, the effectiveness of cleanup strategies, and the involvement of the Navajo EPA in key decisions.

“Our communities have endured the consequences of uranium contamination for decades. While cleanup efforts are progressing, it is critical that we ensure transparency, accountability, and the active participation of our Nation in every stage of this process,” said RDC Chair Brenda Jesus. “We will not allow outside entities to make decisions without the input of our leadership and our people.”

During the meeting, Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency Director Stephen Etsitty raised concerns about the lack of clear communication between USEPA and Navajo EPA, particularly regarding proposed regional repositories for uranium mine waste. Director Etsitty emphasized the importance of meaningful consultation with all impacted communities before any decisions are finalized. He also stressed the need for a long-term water quality monitoring plan to address potential contamination risks to the Little Colorado River and other vital water sources.

Speaker Crystalayne Curley emphasized the importance of protecting Diné water resources, stating, “We do not know how water will flow in the next 100 years, and we must have a plan in place to ensure our future generations are not burdened with the consequences of today’s decisions. Our people have been the gatekeepers of these lands and waters for centuries, and we will not accept solutions that put our health and environment at further risk.”

Concerns were also raised regarding the oversight of remediated mine sites. Delegate Otto Tso questioned who would be responsible for the long-term monitoring and maintenance of sites once cleanup is completed. Delegate Tso highlighted past issues with uranium waste containment and the



RDC members and Speaker Crystalayne Curley met with the US Environmental Protection Agency to discuss uranium mine clean-up.

necessity of an emergency response plan to address any potential future contamination events.

The discussion further revealed tensions surrounding the proposed consolidation of uranium mine waste. Delegate Danny Simpson expressed frustration over the perceived exclusion of Navajo leadership in early-stage planning. He urged USEPA to prioritize a collaborative approach that centers on the perspectives of Diné communities rather than external interests. RDC members also reiterated calls for the removal of uranium waste from the Navajo Nation entirely, citing health risks and community opposition to on-site storage solutions.

The meeting concluded with a renewed commitment from the RDC and Navajo EPA to advocate for Diné interests in all uranium remediation efforts. The RDC emphasized that future discussions must include comprehensive community consultation and respect for Navajo sovereignty in environmental decision-making.

The next steps involve a proposed work session in June, where additional consultations will take place with Navajo Nation leadership and stakeholders to ensure community concerns are addressed before any further action is taken by USEPA.

HEHSC LEADERSHIP MEETING FOCUSES ON TRIBAL EDUCATION POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

GALLUP, NM –On Tuesday, March 18, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) convened a leadership meeting at the University of New Mexico-Gallup, bringing together tribal leaders, school administrators, and policy advocates to address pressing challenges in education governance, student welfare, and policy reform within the Navajo Nation. Continuing discussions centered on amendments to Title 10, school board representation, attendance enforcement, accreditation standards, and the need for stronger data governance.

"Currently, we lack a comprehensive system to track academic progress that would inform and drive important decision making," explained a delegate Dr. Andy Nez. "A data repository system would help us maintain real time data to respond to concerns and issues as they arise."

Data governance was identified as a critical area requiring immediate action. A call was made to develop a Navajo Education Information System that would allow for better tracking of student performance, teacher evaluations, and program effectiveness. Discussions stressed the need for laws that enforce comprehensive data collection, ensuring that decision-making is based on accurate and up-to-date information.

Key topics of discussion was the proposed amendments to Title 10, with an emphasis on clarifying and expanding language related to school board roles and responsibilities. Attendees expressed concerns about the need to clearly define the authority of local and agency school boards within the tribal education system. The importance of ensuring that school board members operate within their governance roles without overstepping into administrative functions was also highlighted.

Another concern was the representation of BIE on the Navajo Nation Board of Education. Participants argued that the absence of such representation limits the ability of these schools to advocate for their needs. Stronger oversight measures were recommended to prevent financial mismanagement and improve educational accountability.

Participants acknowledged that attendance rates have significantly declined since the COVID-19 pandemic, creating challenges in ensuring consistent student engagement. To address this, a proposal was



University of New Mexico-Gallup hosted a leadership meeting bringing together tribal leaders, school administrators, and policy advocates to address pressing challenges in education.

recommended to establish dedicated truancy officers who would work closely with schools and families to address chronic absenteeism

Several participants recommended using the COGNIA accreditation model as a basis for reauthorizing Navajo schools. Attendees emphasized the need for continuous communication between the Department of Diné Education and local schools to ensure proper curriculum oversight. Additionally, integrating Navajo language and cultural education into standardized assessments was proposed to preserve and strengthen cultural identity while maintaining academic rigor.

HEHSC and school officials proposed to conduct a comprehensive review of Title 10 and recommend necessary revisions. The committee also emphasized the importance of ongoing discussions with educators, policymakers, and community leaders to refine and implement proposed policy changes.

"This is not a one-time discussion," said Chair Vince James. "We will continue these conversations and take every necessary step to strengthen the foundation of our education and human services policies."

The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening tribal education governance and improving outcomes for Navajo students. Follow-up meetings are planned to advance these efforts, and the committee invites input from all education stakeholders to help shape community-focused policies.

COUNCIL DELEGATE CARL R. SLATER URGES U.S. TO SIGN AND IMPLEMENT WIPO TREATY ON INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Council Delegate Carl R. Slater testified on Wednesday, March 19, before the United States Patent and Trademark Office Tribal Consultation calling on the United States to sign and implement the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources, and Associated Traditional Knowledge (TK).

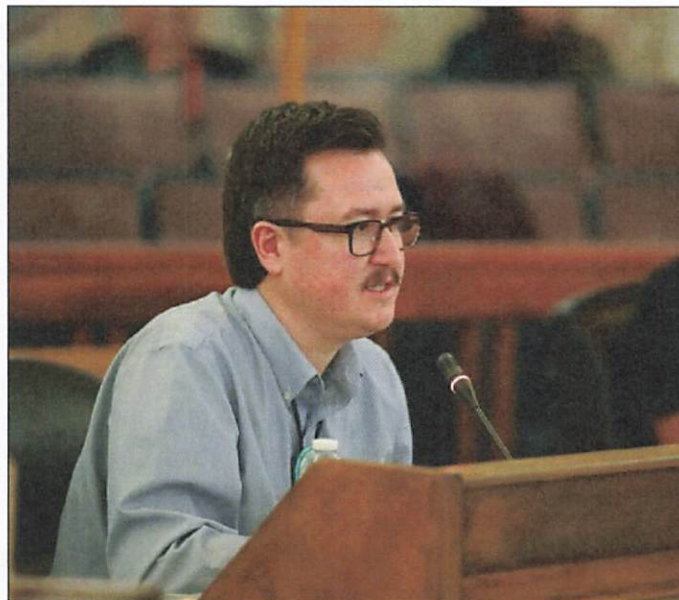
Speaking on behalf of the Navajo Nation, the largest federally recognized tribe in the U.S., Slater emphasized the Treaty's importance in safeguarding Indigenous rights, protecting genetic resources, and ensuring cultural expressions are not exploited by corporations without consent.

"The United States must sign and implement this Treaty to honor our inherent sovereign rights and authority as the guardians of our cultures," Council Delegate Slater declared. "This Treaty recognizes the critical role of Indigenous peoples in bio-innovation, prevents the misappropriation of our cultural knowledge, and provides the transparency that our communities have long sought in the patent system."

The WIPO Treaty, which aims to enhance the patent system's transparency and prevent the wrongful granting of patents related to genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, mandates that patent applicants disclose the origin of any genetic resources or TK used in their inventions. If the origin is unknown, applicants must declare this, with patent offices offering guidance but no obligation to verify the information. Sanctions may apply for failure to disclose, but applicants can correct unintentional omissions, except in cases of fraud.

Council Delegate Slater highlighted the Treaty's potential to help protect the Navajo Nation's rich genetic biodiversity and cultural heritage. "The Navajo people have fought hard to preserve our culture in the place of our ancestors," he said. "With the implementation of this Treaty, we can protect the true nature of Indigenous peoples' contributions to bio-innovation and prevent the ongoing exploitation that has marred our history."

The Treaty also proposes the creation of information



On Wednesday, March 19, Council Delegate Carl R. Slater testified before the USPTO Tribal Consultation.

systems, such as databases, to assist patent offices in tracking and examining patents linked to genetic resources and associated TK. These systems would be developed in consultation with Indigenous communities to ensure their perspectives are included. A review mechanism will evaluate the Treaty's effectiveness after four years and consider expanding its scope to other areas of intellectual property.

In closing, Delegate Slater urged that the implementation process actively involve Indigenous stakeholders, not only in creating information systems but also in shaping national laws, regulations, and policies related to the Treaty's application. He concluded, "This Treaty is a considered step in recognizing the history of Indigenous peoples and ensuring our rights are respected in the future of bio-innovation."

The U.S. is now at a critical juncture, with the Treaty set to enter into force once 15 countries have ratified it. Council Delegate Slater's testimony underscores the urgency for the U.S. to demonstrate leadership in protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples by signing and fully implementing the WIPO Treaty.

RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE APPROVES TEMPORARY BURIAL POLICY WAIVER TO ADDRESS URGENT NEEDS

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Monday, March 31, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) has approved a temporary waiver to burial regulations to help grieving families facing delays due to regulatory barriers. The measure allows the Department Manager of the Navajo Land Department to temporarily authorize family plot burials in lieu of a designated sexton, expediting the process amid mounting community needs.

The approved waiver temporarily lifts two burial regulation provisions. Section II (V), which requires a designated sexton to sign Final Disposition Authorizations, and Section III (A), which prohibits any burial without a sexton's signed approval and outlines civil penalties for unauthorized burials.

Legislation sponsor, RDC Vice Chair, Casey Allen Johnson called the resolution a necessary interim solution to help families secure final disposition authorizations for loved ones.

"There's been a backlog, and this action gives families some relief as we work to revise the cemetery regulations. It's a compassionate step forward," Johnson said.

The Navajo Nation Burial and Cemetery Regulations normally require a designated sexton, an official empowered to authorize burial for each cemetery. Current rules prohibit Council Delegates, chapter officials, and various Navajo Nation employees from serving in this capacity. Without an appointed sexton, families are unable to legally bury loved ones when plots are already established.

Navajo Land Department Manager Byron Bitsoie Sr. emphasized the urgency during the RDC's March 25 meeting.

"We're receiving burial requests daily, through calls and emails. We've helped over 75 families since last September. This waiver is about doing what's humane and necessary. We want to give families the dignity of a timely burial", said Bitsoie.

Speaker Otto Tso proposed extending the waiver to a new deadline of June 30, 2025, offering a three-month window to revise burial rules.



Resources and Development Committee approved an amendment to the current burial regulations.

"We need to get this fixed," said Delegate Rickie Nez. "We don't want grieving families to be turned away or shuffled between agencies."

Legislative Branch Legal Counsel Mariana Kahn clarified that only the Department Manager—not Council Delegates, Land Board members, or chapter officials—is empowered to sign on behalf of the sexton during the waiver period.

"The legislation is clearly written. Only the Department Manager may act in this role until the waiver expires," Kahn said.

The committee also requested immediate communication with mortuaries and local chapters to prevent confusion. Delegate Danny Simpson urged outreach.

"We need to get this information out immediately so that chapters and mortuaries aren't left in the dark", said Simpson.

As final authority, the Resources and Development Committee voted four in favor with none opposed. The temporary waiver will expire on June 30, 2025, unless permanent revisions are adopted sooner.

RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE DELIBERATES CONCERNS REGARDING PASTURE, RANGELAND, AND FORAGE INSURANCE

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Monday, March 24, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) deliberated a report from Native Land Insurance Incorporated regarding the Navajo Nation's Pasture, Rangeland, and Forage (PRF) insurance policy during the first interval of coverage.

The Committee addressed concerns about insurance premiums, reduced land base coverage, and indemnity benefits paid to farmers and ranchers.

"Navajo Nation farmers and ranchers are facing the lingering impacts of climate change and reduced precipitation, and many rely on PRF insurance to protect against financial losses due to lack of rainfall," said RDC Chair Brenda Jesus. "We need to establish a baseline of information and education to report back to them."

CEO and Agent of Native Land Insurance Service Brittany Begay explained that PRF insurance assists ranchers who experience below-average rainfall, providing payments for forage loss. Her update focused on the first interval of coverage for January and February and addressed key components, including premiums and indemnities, which represent payments for loss.

Begay clarified that the premium for PRF insurance is due by December 1, and precipitation data for determining payouts is collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), with preliminary data taking 60-90 days to finalize.

Once NOAA finalizes the precipitation data, it issues a credit to the premium, and after the premium is paid, estimated indemnities are sent to the Agricultural Infrastructure Fund (AIF). This year's premium is \$14.9 million, a decrease from \$23 million last year, covering about 12.8 million acres of trust land. The total coverage purchased amounts to \$127 million, the maximum allowed by the policy.

For the January-February interval, NOAA estimated indemnities at \$9 million, but after reconciliation of the insurance premium, the final amount due is \$5.8 million.

Council Delegate Shawna Ann Claw raised concerns about the decrease in projected indemnity payouts and asked if there was a reduction in the land covered by NOAA's precipitation data.



CEO and Agent of Native Land Insurance Service Brittany Begay provides update focusing on first interval coverage.

"You're indicating an indemnity payment of \$5 million for the Nation," said Claw. "In the last payment, the RDC received over \$13 million. The current payment is not even half of the last payment."

Claw stressed the need for more public education, including a portal, to update Navajo farmers and ranchers.

Council Delegate Danny Simpson also questioned how much allotment land had been removed from coverage and asked for clarification on the number of acres insured and a projection for future coverage.

Regarding the decrease in acreage, Begay explained that it reflects USDA compliance.

"This is a USDA program, and we must follow compliance. Some previous acreages were allotted or Bureau of Land Management lands and are not covered by the current policy. We only insure grazable acres. If we over-insure acreage, we'll be responsible for paying back those indemnities," Begay said.

Begay also reported that, according to the USDA, PRF coverage does not extend to acreage where allottees pay the Bureau of Indian Affairs for grazing permits or cover vacant farmland.

"We only cover grazing lands and farmers or ranchers must have these lands in their names," she said.

Council Delegate Rickie Nez expressed concerns about coverage changes for farmers previously covered under the old policy, particularly for those

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along the San Juan River.

"We can sit and talk about this all day and ask questions. But if these farmlands aren't covered, like those along the San Juan River, our farmers will ask what kind of insurance the Nation got," said Nez.

Council Delegate Claw warned that coverage stipulations could create conflicts among communities and stressed the need for more public outreach by Native Land Insurance.

"You need to let communities know they will not

receive incentives, that is not the RDC's responsibility," Claw said. "As Delegate Nez said, the whole purpose is to support agriculture. We talk about sustainability, but we pull programs or incentives from under our farmers' feet."

The Resources and Development Committee voted unanimously in favor of accepting the update report from Native Lands Insurance Incorporated. The Committee requested that Native Lands Insurance provide a report during the next Naabik'iyáti' Committee meeting.

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL MOURNS THE PASSING OF FORMER COUNCIL DELEGATE BENJAMIN A. BEGAY

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The 25th Navajo Nation Council was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of former Council Delegate Benjamin A. Begay (Tselani/ Cottonwood/ Nazlini), who served from 1991 to 1995.

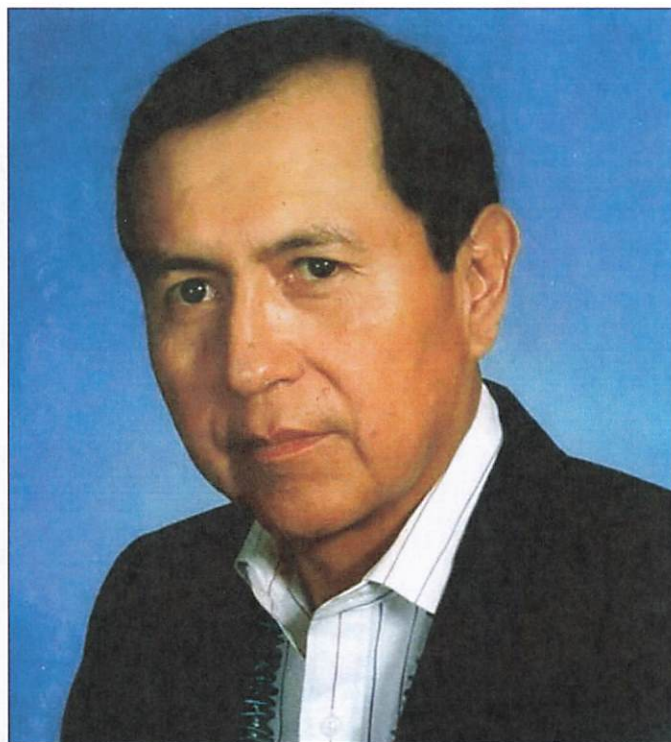
"The 25th Navajo Nation Council extends heartfelt condolences to the family of former Council Delegate Benjamin A. Begay. His unwavering commitment to the Navajo Nation and his advocacy for economic development, including the Tseyi' Shopping Center Inc. and numerous small businesses, had a lasting impact on the communities he served," said Speaker Crystalyne Curley.

Beyond his service as a Council Delegate, Begay held various leadership roles, including serving as a member of the Nazlini School Board, working with the Navajo Nation Regional Business Development Office, coordinating efforts with the Houck Chapter, and contributing to the Navajo Nation Rodeo Cowboy Association.

In his retirement, Begay became a cattle and sheep rancher, managing properties in the Fluted Rock/ Sawmill area and northwest of Nazlini. He is survived by a large extended family.

"We are grateful to former Council Delegate Begay and his family for sharing his time, expertise, and dedication with the Navajo Nation," said Speaker Crystalyne Curley. "His business acumen has greatly benefited the Navajo Nation."

Funeral services for Benjamin A. Begay were held on Wednesday, March 19, 2025, at 10 a.m. (MDT)



Benjamin Begay

at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Saint Michaels. A reception followed at the family residence at Beeak'id Hatsó, northeast of the Nazlini Chapter Mesa Top on Highway 191 at Milepost 435.



Join the Missing and Murdered Diné Relative Task Force



Awareness Walk

Honoring the Lives of All Missing Native Children



**April
21st**

8AM

- Dress appropriately for the weather
- wear comfortable shoes
- Wear red to show your support
- The Navajo Nation Council is not responsible for any injury or theft
- Water will be provided

**Start @ Navajo
Nation Museum
Parking lot
End @ Navajo
Nation Council
Chamber**



25th Navajo Nation Council



For more information contact

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