

COMMUNITY UPDATE

Nihitahgó Adahoonííígíí Baahane'

DIVISION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

April 2026

T'ááchil

Díí naltsoos biyi' baach'ida hwiit'aah.....

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Ni' bée hoziníshii...

Did You Know...

Shiyazh Pete, a native of Shiprock, was signed by the Dallas Cowboys in April 2026. His achievement marks a proud milestone for his hometown and the Navajo Nation, highlighting the growing presence of Native American athletes on the national stage. Pete's journey to the NFL reflects dedication, perseverance, and serves as an inspiration to youth across his community.

T'áán náhah bikeh ndahoo'aah

Events:

April: T'ááchil - Little Leaves

April 1: April Fool's Day

April 3: Good Friday

April 5: Easter

April 16: Navajo Nation Sovereignty Day

April 22: Earth Day

May: T'áátsoh - Big Leaves

May 2: Running of the Roses - Kentucky Derby

May 4: May the 4th Be With You

May 5: Cinco de Mayo

May 8: Mother's Day

May 25: Memorial Day

Stronger Together: \$6 Million Brings Hope and Emergency Support to Navajo Nation Chapters



On Thursday, April 2, the Navajo Nation Council (25th Council) officially signed Resolution CMA-20-26 into law, approving \$6 million in emergency funding for all 110 chapters for Fiscal Year 2026.

Sponsored by Council Delegate George H. Tolth, the resolution was shaped through collaboration with multiple chapters to ensure it reflects local priorities and aligns with Navajo values. The signing event brought together tribal leadership, chapter officials, and community members in a shared commitment to strengthening local response efforts.

Community-Driven Support

Delegate Tolth emphasized that the measure is a result of chapters working together and listening closely to community voices—especially elders. The funding is designed to directly support those most in need while honoring traditional values and practices.

Newly appointed Delegate Titus Nez also attended, reinforcing continued

leadership support for grassroots, community-based solutions.

What This Means for Chapters

This funding will help chapters:

- * Provide immediate emergency assistance
- * Strengthen preparedness and response plans
- * Respond more quickly to protect residents, homes, and infrastructure

Chapters will be better equipped to address challenges such as:

- * Severe weather events
- * Road closures
- * Power and water outages
- * Flooding and drought
- * Public safety concerns

How Funds Are Distributed

The \$6 million allocation comes from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance and will be distributed using a balanced formula:

50% equally shared among all 110 chapters

50% based on population using registered voter counts

Funding by Agency:

- * Chinle Agency: \$799,209
- * Eastern Agency: \$1,522,740
- * Fort Defiance Agency: \$1,481,039
- * Shiprock Agency: \$1,135,042
- * Western Agency: \$1,031,970

Strengthening Local Response

Resolution CMA-20-26 highlights the Navajo Nation's continued commitment to empowering chapters as the first line of response during emergencies. By investing in local capacity and equitable distribution, the Nation is reinforcing community resilience and preparedness across all five agencies.



NAVAJO NATION CHAPTER EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FUNDING

RESOLUTION CMA-20-26 | \$6 MILLION INVESTMENT IN ALL 110 CHAPTERS | FISCAL YEAR 2026



TOTAL FUNDING
\$6,000,000

From the Unreserved,
Undesignated Fund Balance
(UUFB)

HOW FUNDS ARE DISTRIBUTED



50%
EQUALLY DISTRIBUTED
to all 110 chapters



50%
DISTRIBUTED BY POPULATION
using registered voter counts

SUPPORTING CHAPTERS IN RESPONDING TO:



Severe Weather



Power & Water Outages



Road Closures



Drought



Flooding



Public Safety
Concerns



FUNDING BY AGENCY

CHINLE AGENCY

\$799,209

13.3%

EASTERN AGENCY

\$1,522,740

25.4%

FORT DEFIANCE AGENCY

\$1,481,039

24.7%

SHIPROCK AGENCY

\$1,135,042

18.9%

WESTERN AGENCY

\$1,031,970

17.2%

TOTAL: \$6,000,000

100%



**STRENGTHENING CHAPTERS.
PROTECTING OUR PEOPLE.**



This funding will help chapters provide direct emergency assistance, strengthen preparedness plans, and respond quickly to protect people, homes, and communities.



**TOGETHER, WE BUILD STRONGER,
SAFER COMMUNITIES.**

110 CHAPTERS. FIVE AGENCIES. ONE NAVAJO NATION.



FUNDS WILL SUPPORT RESPONSES TO ROAD CLOSURES, POWER AND WATER OUTAGES, FLOODING, DROUGHT, AND OTHER CONDITIONS THAT AFFECT COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL-BEING.



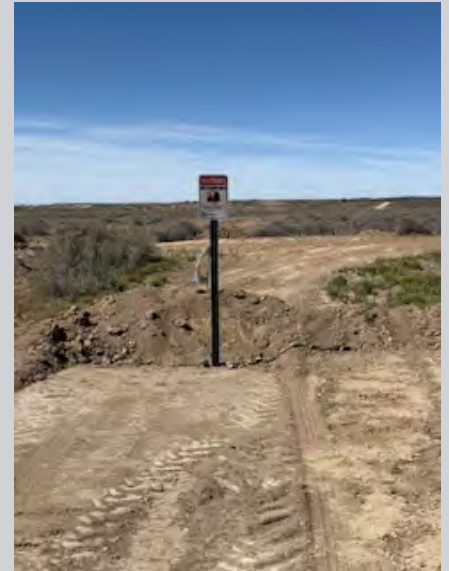
Shiprock Community Unites to Clean Up Highways and Strengthen Environmental Stewardship



One of the highlights under Solid Waste Management is supporting the Shiprock Chapter in organizing community efforts to pick up trash along the highway, bringing together local residents to improve cleanliness, promote environmental responsibility, and enhance the overall appearance of the area.



Solid Waste Department Expanding Waste Services and Deterring Illegal Dumping Across Chapter Communities



The Solid Waste Management Department continues to support communities by selecting 35 chapters per delegate region and funding 40-yard roll-off bins for chapter and community use. This initiative provides residents with the opportunity to clean their yards and properly dispose of household trash. In addition, signage is being installed throughout chapter areas, particularly at known illegal dumping sites, to help deter future dumping. These efforts aim to reduce environmental impacts while encouraging community members to utilize local transfer stations and convenience bins available at their chapters.



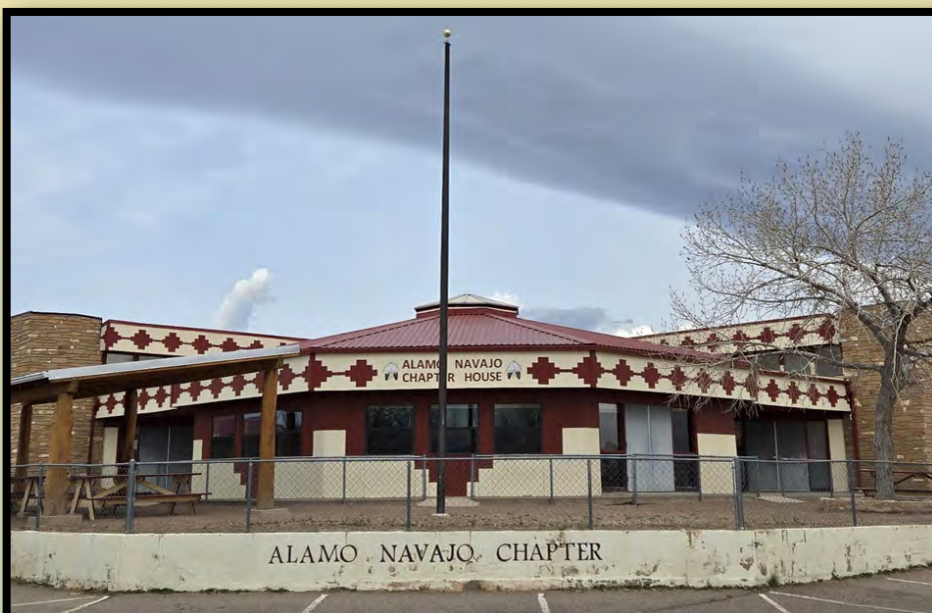
Alamo Navajo Chapter Planning Highlights



Huge congratulations to the Alamo Navajo Chapter for reaching a major milestone in successfully updating and completing their Community-Based Land Use Planning (CBLUP) manual. This achievement reflects the group's consistent dedication, collaboration, and diligent effort over time to ensure the document is thorough, forward-thinking, and representative of the community's vision.

The completed planning document highlights existing conditions, identifies current priorities, and outlines future projects that will guide the Chapter toward building a safer, more resilient, and sustainable community. It serves as a powerful roadmap for growth—supporting informed decision-making, strengthening local governance, and creating opportunities that will benefit generations to come.

The manual is now advancing to the next phase and is currently awaiting legislation sponsorship by Delegate Norman Begaye. This marks an exciting step forward as the Chapter moves closer to formal adoption and implementation of their plan.



Once again, congratulations to the Alamo Navajo Chapter for this outstanding accomplishment. Your commitment to proactive planning and community development is truly commendable, and this work sets a strong foundation for a thriving future.

Latasha James, Senior
Planner, DCD



NNDCCD Recruitment

Bringing Services to the People – Rio West Mall Job Fair

NNDCCD staff participated in a community job fair at Rio West Mall, providing direct outreach and information to attendees about programs, services, and opportunities available through the Division. The event created a central, accessible space for community members to connect with resources, ask questions, and learn about support available to Chapters across the Navajo Nation.

Community Impact

This outreach effort strengthened visibility and accessibility of NNDCCD services. By meeting people where they are—in a public, high-traffic location—staff were able to:

- Increase awareness of available resources
- Build trust through face-to-face interaction
- Provide immediate, practical assistance
- Encourage community participation and engagement



CAPITAL PROJECTS
MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

Welcome OUR NEW
TEAM MEMBERS!



Ramon L. Scott
Senior Accountant



Charmayne Eriacho
Project Manager



Cory Phillips
Project Manager

Ramon Scott is an experienced senior accountant with over nine years of multi-sector expertise. As a Senior Accountant with the Capital Projects Management Department, he specializes in ledger maintenance, budgeting, and financial reporting. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Accountancy from Arizona State University and is known for delivering accurate financials under tight deadlines. Ramon's expertise includes improving accounting processes, configuring databases, implementing automated payroll systems, and building dynamic Excel models for real-time analysis.

Prior to CPMD, Ramon served as Principal Accountant for the City of Rio Rancho and as an Accountant III for University of New Mexico. His audit experience includes work with the Arizona Department of Revenue and the Gila County Assessor's Office, resolving transaction privilege tax and business personal property audits. When he's not crunching numbers, Ramon enjoys hiking, trout fishing, and exploring iconic destinations and cultural landmarks.

Hi everyone! I'm Charmayne Eriacho, and I'm thrilled to join the CPMD team as a Project Manager. With a JD and a background in high-stakes compliance programs within the cannabis and environmental sectors, I specialize in turning 'organized chaos' into streamlined workflows. I'm passionate about building the structures, SOPs, and dashboards that help teams run smoothly. Outside of work, you can usually find me traveling, fishing or hanging out with my cats. I'm looking forward to collaborating with you all!

Corey Phillips is a Project Manager for the Navajo Nation with more than 15 years of construction experience. He currently leads two chapter-level projects and oversees the development of 20 new senior citizen center buildings, and delivering infrastructure that supports community well-being, with a strong emphasis on improving services and quality of life for elders. In his free time, he enjoys spending time outdoors.

We're excited to welcome three new team members to the Capital Projects Management Department! Their fresh ideas and expertise will make our team even stronger as we continue to grow together.

Let's give them a big round of applause and a warm welcome!

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES CENTERS

The Administrative Service Centers (ASC) continued to provide comprehensive support to Chapters across all agencies during the month of April 2026. Efforts remained focused on strengthening governance, ensuring compliance with applicable laws and policies, and enhancing operational capacity at the Chapter level. In addition to the activities outlined below, ASC staff continued to provide daily technical assistance to Chapter staff and elected officials, addressing ongoing needs related to financial management, reporting requirements, policy interpretation, and administrative operations.

Fort Defiance ASC Office

ASC staff facilitated and supported budget development efforts through budget sessions held on April 22 and April 30, ensuring Chapters remain aligned with fiscal planning requirements. Follow-up efforts were also conducted with Tohatchi Chapter regarding Audit Corrective Action Plan (CAP) progress, reinforcing compliance and accountability standards.

Dilkon ASC Office

Support activities included participation in key interdepartmental meetings to address compliance and legal matters. On April 9, ASC staff attended meetings with the Office of the Attorney General regarding CAP updates. Additional engagements included a Department of Justice presentation on April 17 and an Office of Environmental Health (OEH) meeting on April 23, ensuring coordination on legal, environmental, and regulatory requirements.

Tuba City ASC Office

ASC staff participated in the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) Title 26 Public Hearing held on April 8 at Tonalea Chapter, supporting legislative awareness and community engagement. Additionally, the agency provided technical assistance to the Kayenta ASC Office in supporting Chapters requiring MIP (financial system) guidance, ensuring continued financial reporting accuracy and system utilization.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES CENTERS

Shiprock ASC Office

On April 10, ASC staff supported the RDC Title 26 Public Hearing at Upper Fruitland Chapter. Continued efforts are underway to support the reopening of Shiprock Chapter, with ASC providing ongoing guidance to ensure all requirements for operational readiness are met. Technical assistance and administrative support remain ongoing for Chapters throughout the agency.

Chinle ASC Office

ASC staff conducted a MIP Refresher Training on April 1, reinforcing financial system knowledge and compliance. From April 7–9, a comprehensive worksession was held covering critical governance and operational topics, including:

- Local Governance Act (LGA) Models
- Privacy Act requirements
- Emergency Planning
- Navajo Preference in Employment Act
- Audit processes and CAPs
- Ethics in Government Law
- Infrastructure Capital Improvement Planning (ICIP)
- General compliance standards

These sessions strengthened Chapter-level capacity and reinforced adherence to Navajo Nation laws and policies.

Crownpoint ASC Office

ASC staff conducted a Records Management Training on April 30, emphasizing proper documentation practices and compliance with records retention standards. Additionally, ten (10) one-on-one training sessions were completed with individual Chapters to address specific operational needs. The agency also onboarded two (2) new Community Services Coordinators (CSCs), enhancing service delivery capacity.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES CENTERS

Kayenta ASC Office

ASC staff continued to provide ongoing technical assistance and operational support to Chapters within the agency, with particular emphasis on financial system support and inter-agency coordination.

Gallup ASC Office

ASC staff conducted a Financial Reporting Training on April 8, strengthening fiscal accountability and reporting practices. On April 21, staff met with Retirement Services to address employee benefits for Certified Chapters, ensuring clarity and compliance. Additional support included:

- Assisting Alamo and Church Rock Chapters with near completion of Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) Manuals
- Supporting Baahaali and Chilchitah Chapters in completing Solid Waste Management Plans

These efforts contribute to long-term planning and environmental compliance.

Administrative Service Centers Central Office

During April, ASC processed a total of 71 Chapter budgets, ensuring timely review and approval in accordance with fiscal policies. Additionally, the Senior Programs and Projects Specialist (SPPS) and Department Manager participated in the Division of Community Development (DCD) Strategic Planning Session held April 23–24, contributing to department-wide planning and alignment with organizational priorities.

Chapter Highlights

Coppermine Clean Community Initiative utilizing the Navajo Nation sales tax & the Unhealthy food tax to have the community come together for a Cleaner, Safer Environment!



COPPERMINE CLEAN COMMUNITY INITIATIVE
Nahasdzáán Baa Ahayá
Béésh Hagééd

Community members, families, & organizations are encouraged to get involved (ages 12 & older)

APRIL 18
8:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Coppermine Chapter Meeting Hall

- Garbage bags and gloves provided
- Lunch provided for volunteers
- Dress appropriately for outdoor clean-up (closed-toe shoes, hat, etc.)

<https://coppermine.navajochapters.org>

The Coppermine Community came together on Saturday April 18, 2026 to make our surroundings cleaner and safer for everyone. The participation was vital, and it left a positive impact on our environment!

As Safety was our top priority. We partnered with NDOT and their safety technicians who provided us with a Job Hazard Analysis form. All participants were encouraged to sign the JHA form. Forms were available at the chapter administration building.

Plastic bags, gloves, and face masks were available for pick up at the chapter the morning of trash day.

To ensure everyone's safety, children under 12 were not allowed to collect trash along the highways. Thank you for your understanding.

We told all participants to use Personal Protective Equipment & Safety Gear:

- Wear all provided PPE, including gloves and masks.
- Dress in bright colors and high-visibility vests.
- Wear closed-toe shoes for protection.

• Do not handle broken glass or needles—report these hazards to organizers.

Traffic Controls & Worksite Safety:

- Work in groups—never alone.
- Stay at least 5 feet away from pavement and highways.
- Always face oncoming traffic while working near the road.
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) assisted with road signage for added safety.
- Always face oncoming traffic while working near the road.
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) assisted with road signage for added safety.

After the trash pick up volunteers brought their filled trash bags to the Chapter.

In appreciation for their hard work, they all receive a t-shirt, food, and additional PPE supplies.

Closing Remarks:

Let's make this clean-up an annual tradition, fostering a spirit of stewardship for our community and environment. Together, we can create lasting positive change—thank you for doing your part! Finally, we extend our gratitude to Ericka from our CHIP team for facilitating the participation of various departments within the Coppermine Chapter.

Thank you,



Constance Lano
Community Service Coordinator



Bulletin Board

Tsineeshjii' Naaltsoos Bídadiiljéehí

'CHOPPED' CROWNS NAVAJO CHEF JUSTIN PIOCHE AS INDIGENOUS CHAMPION

THE WINNER OF THE FOOD NETWORK'S SPECIAL INDIGENOUS EPISODE WOWS JUDGES WITH NATIVE IMAGINATION

by Sandra Hale Schulman and Jourdan Bennett-Begaye
March 13, 2026

Cheers of "Yéégo, Justin! Yéégo!" erupted and the Navajo Nation flag waved at a hometown watch party as Navajo Chef Justin Pioche hustled to beat the timer on the Food Network's first-ever Indigenous-themed "Chopped" competition, "Indigenous Inspiration."

By the time it was all over, Pioche had claimed the crown as the "Chopped" champion after a friendly but fierce competition with three other Indigenous chefs – Mariah Gladstone, Blackfeet and Cherokee; Ray Naranjo, Santa Clara Pueblo; and Jessica Walks First, Menominee.

"It was all about harmony, and we had the same agenda: promoting Native foods, Native business and all the above," Pioche told ICT as the episode aired for the first time on April 21, 2026.

More than 100 people turned out in Farmington, New Mexico, for the party, which featured hand fans, stickers, gold necklaces, party horns and other hand-outs with Pioche's image. Every big screen in the restaurant and on the patio played "Chopped."

The entire restaurant erupted into applause, screams and whoos after the Food Network announced the "Chopped" champion was the Navajo Nation's very own. The room shook with excitement and joy. Hands and phones flew up to capture the moment.

Pioche smiled and walked around the Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant high-fiving and hugging family, friends, community members, and fellow "Chopped" lovers, while his sister and sous chef, Tia Pioche, captured her brother and the restaurant's energy on her phone for social media.

Like all viewers, it was Pioche's first time watching the prepped episode. Pioche runs the family catering and private dining business, Pioche Food Group, from Fruitland, New Mexico, with his sister and mom, Janice Pioche.

"It was pretty fun," he said after his win was announced. "I really enjoyed seeing everyone else's reaction. It was really exciting."

The "Indigenous Inspiration" episode included the four Native competitors and two prominent Native American chefs among the three-judge panel of experts, with "Sioux Chef" Sean Sherman and Prairie Band Potawatomi Chef Pyet DeSpain joining Chef Eric Adjepong, who is Ghanian, at the judges' table.

Mystery baskets revealed

The three-round competition featured a host of Indigenous foods in "mystery" baskets to be used for appetizers, entrees and desserts. The baskets included familiar Indigenous ingredients such as bison, whitefish, pemmican, sumac berries, pawpaw pulp, as well as some wild cards, such as sweet corn ice cream bars shaped like ears of corn.

The celebrity chefs were quick to note the special nature of the episode.

"Tonight isn't just about competition – it's about visibility," said Chef Pyet, as she is known, on social media. "To see Indigenous chefs, ingredients, and foodways highlighted on a platform like Food Network means something deeper. It's a step toward honoring the original people of this land and recognizing the richness and diversity of the cuisines that shape America."

She continued, "Grateful for every chef who showed up, every story shared, and every person behind the scenes who helped bring this to life. May this be one of many."

Host Ted Allen acknowledged the significance at the beginning of the show.



Navajo Chef Justin Pioche celebrates at a watch party on April 21, 2026, as he is declared the champion of the Food Network's Indigenous episode of "Chopped." His family hosted the party at Buffalo Wild Wings in Farmington, New Mexico, to watch the show as it aired. Credit: Jourdan Bennett-Begaye/ICT

"For this special competition, we are honored to have four chefs whose culinary points of view are so deeply aligned with their Indigenous communities and cultures," he said. "We are very excited to be inspired by what you create on the plate."

Round one: Appetizers

The three-course competition started with appetizers, with the mystery basket containing whitefish, sumac, pawpaw pulp and small fry breads called kahsherohni.

The chefs got to work, whipping up on the spot dishes using techniques and adapted menus from their regions. Pioche made sauteed whitefish with pawpaw salsa and even went an extra step – which may have contributed to his win – saying, "I have some sumac boiling right now, so I'll make a little tea for you guys. A little treat."

Sherman took notice.

"Oh, yeah," he said. "Seems like Justin's clearly showing a lot of expertise behind that ingredient."

Pioche also provided some important Indigenous health information as he continued, drawing attention to the avoidance of processed sugars and flour.

"I'm going to finish the tea with a little bit of agave, because it's lower on the glycemic index," he said on the program. "European ingredients that were introduced to us in the Americas, like dairy, wheat flour and cane sugar just don't sit well. [Sumac tea] is something that's healing for my people. Whenever we have an upset stomach, that's what we drink."

Gladstone had an issue with the kahsherohni, noting its roots in colonizations.

"Frybread comes from a time when we were dependent on government ration boxes," she said. "We created frybread with those things so we didn't have to face starvation. But frybread isn't exactly super healthy. I just don't incorporate it a lot."

She used the bread, however, to form an open-faced sandwich with sumac, whitefish, pawpaw sauce with raspberries and quick-pickled onions.

The two chefs from arid New Mexico, Naranjo and Pioche, wrestled a bit with the whitefish, which is not something they generally cook with.

Naranjo made a sumac-dusted, white fish tostada with a pawpaw aioli, saying, "The story that I like with my food is

that when you eat food from the Southwest and Mexican cultures, it's also Indigenous and often overlooked."

Sherman chimed in, saying, "I really love that you're utilizing some of the Mexican styling here because Mexican food is more Indigenous than it is European."

Walks First made a pan-seared sumac and garlic white fish with pawpaw maple glaze, but was chopped from the first round, leaving the stage in tears but proud to have been there.

"You know, being right here, today, all of us, we have families that look up to us, communities that look up to us," she said. "It's a big step for every one of us, and for my grandchildren and child to see that it is okay to chase their dreams."

Round Two: Bring on the bison

The chefs got creative with the basket of ingredients for the main course, which included bison steaks, anaheim chiles, lima beans and that oddball corn ice cream.

Gladstone made bison steak strips on top of ice-cream fritters, with a creamy chile sauce. Pioche made a chile rub for the ribeyes, with charred lima beans and sweet corn grits.

Chef Naranjo was chopped because his sweet corn ice cream got lost in a bean/corn mush he made as a side dish to the bison.

He took it in stride.

"I don't see that as a loss at all," he said. "I see that as an important way to show what we're all about. So, hey, it's a good thing."

Round Three: A sweet finish

Chefs Pioche and Gladstone squared off the final round by making a dessert with the basket of pemmican, Saskatoon berries, sweet potatoes, and stone-milled whole wheat flour. The judges noted the inclusion of flour.

"It's going to be interesting, because ... both of these chefs don't typically use wheat flour; it is not indigenous to the Americas," Chef Pyet said. "But this particular wheat flour is coming from Ramona Farms, an heirloom brand of wheat that a particular tribe has been saving and growing. So it's got a lot of cultural meaning to them."

READ MORE: <https://tinyurl.com/nhb2zajd>

Bulletin Board

Tsineeshjii' Naaltsoos Bídadiiljeehí

Route 66, a quintessential American road trip heavy on kitsch and history, turns 100

BY SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN

April 8, 2026

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) – There are faster ways to get from Chicago to Los Angeles, but none have the allure or cultural cachet of Route 66.

To John Steinbeck, it was the Mother Road that led poor farmers from Dust Bowl desperation to sunny California. To Native Americans along the route, it was an economic boon that also left scars. To Black travelers, it offered sanctuary during segregation. And to music fans, it was the place to get their kicks.

Route 66 marks its 100th anniversary this year. Despite losing its status decades ago as one of the nation's main arteries, people from around the world still flock to it to take perhaps the quintessential American road trip and soak in its neon lights, kitschy motels and attractions, and culinary offerings.

Each town has its own history and magic, said Sebastiaan de Boorder, a Dutch entrepreneur who, with his wife, breathed new life into The Aztec Motel in Seligman, Arizona.

"It's an essential part of American culture and history," he said of the highway. "The historical aspect is just a very big important part of American culture, with its influence and its character."

The dream

Route 66, which runs for roughly 2,400 miles (3,860 kilometers) from Chicago through Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona before ending in Santa Monica, California, was stitched together a century ago from a collection of Native American trading routes and old dirt roads with the goal of linking the industrial Midwest to the Pacific coast.

Oklahoma businessman Cyrus Avery, known as the Father of Route 66, saw it as more than just a way to cross the country efficiently. It was a chance to connect rural America and create new pockets of commerce.

Avery knew the number 66 would be ripe for marketing and could be seared into drivers' minds, and he was right: Route 66 has been immortalized in movies, books, including Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" and Jack Kerouac's "On the Road," and songs such as Bobby Troup's "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66," which served as an anthem for post-World War II optimism and mobility.

Waves of migration

Since its November 1926 designation as one of the



nation's original numbered highways, the onetime Main Street of America has embodied the promise of prosperity. It became a literal path of hope for migrants escaping drought-ravaged farms and poverty during the 1930s Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. And during World War II, it was used to move troops, equipment and workers out West.

READ MORE: <https://tinyurl.com/eetc93vd>

Navajo Code Talker Jimmie Preston honored: naming of first bridge in Arizona for a Navajo Code Talker

S.J. Wilson Special to Navajo-Hopi Observer

CAMERON – Cameron Chapter officials, community members, the Veterans Organization, Navajo Nation Police and Highway Patrol officers, representatives of the Arizona Department of Transportation, the Cameron Veterans Organization, the mayor of Tusayan, Coconino County Board of Supervisors, representatives from the Democratic Party and other Navajo Nation offices, family and friends gathered for the historic unveiling of the newly named Navajo Code Talker Jimmie Preston Bridge over the Little Colorado River gorge next to the Cameron Trading Post.

Grandson Sheldon Preston served as the keynote speaker at the event.

"I and my family, the community of Cameron, as well as the Navajo people are grateful – so thankful – and sincerely appreciative of the renaming of the Cameron bridge. My grandfather was a 'Son of Cameron'. Today we honor my grandfather and we honor his place and community."

To the Cameron Veterans Organization, which conducted the ceremony, Preston said, "You are the 'Sons of Cameron', our courageous veterans. We are grateful for your duty, service, and sacrifice. You are the pride of Cameron."

Preston didn't meet his grandfather, who passed away at the age of 43, but Jimmie Preston has been an integral part of his – and his entire family's – life. The son of Scott and Mattie Preston, born March 16, 1922, Preston attended the Tuba City Vocational School, where he met his future wife. During a trip to Flagstaff, he saw a U.S. Marine Corps recruiting poster and was drawn to the photo of a sharply dressed Marine in his dress blues.

"Jimmie wanted to be sharp. He wanted to be one of those Marines." Sheldon Preston said. "I think the only thing my grandfather wanted was to be a Marine. And he wanted to marry Sallie Keetso. Jimmie did both without the permission of his parents."

READ MORE: <https://tinyurl.com/2tdf4bhs>



Peter McDonald, Navajo Code Talker and former chairman of the Navajo Nation, with state Sen. Jamescita Peshlakai. (Courtesy photo)

Bulletin Board

Tsineeshjii' Naaltsoos Bidadiiljeehi

New remote claims program expands lifeline for Navajo Nation and rural Arizona veterans

The goal is to help veterans secure disability ratings, survivor benefits, and education benefits both for themselves and their families

By: Craig McKee

Mar 25, 2026

PHOENIX – A first-of-its-kind remote claims initiative launched by the Disabled American Veterans Department of Arizona is helping rural and tribal veterans file for the benefits they've earned without driving hours to the nearest service office.

The program, a roughly \$50,000 investment over two years, outfits service officers statewide with 38 Windows laptops, 11 tablets, and 11 iPads, each paired with keyboard cases, styluses, and boxes of flash drives.

The equipment allows veterans in remote communities – including the Navajo Nation and the mining town of Globe – to connect by video with trained veteran service officers, turning what was once a five-hour trip into a computer call.

"It's all about getting out of the chapter house, going into the community where the veterans are that can't come to you," said Dr. Carl Forkner, a veteran service officer and Adjutant of the DAV Department of Arizona. "If you're in the Navajo Nation – Piñon or Chinle – you're five hours away from the nearest service officer. That's a long drive. That's an overnight trip."

Forkner said Arizona is the first state to roll out this kind of remote claims network for veterans, with other states already expressing interest, especially those with large Native nations and rural populations.

While veterans can technically file a claim online themselves, advocates say the process is complicated, easy to get wrong, and full of traps that can lead to denials or delays.

"They don't speak VA," Forkner said. "This program works very well, and it's just like you're sitting there with the veteran."

Through the new system, veterans in communities such as Globe, Claypool, San Carlos, and Roosevelt Lake can walk into a local site – often a lodge, wellness center or community building – sit down at a dedicated computer and connect via Zoom to a DAV service officer anywhere in the state. After documents are transmitted and forms completed, the veteran leaves with a flash drive copy of their claim and the peace of mind that it was filed correctly.

The goal is to help veterans secure disability ratings, survivor benefits, and education benefits both for themselves and their families.

In Globe, Army veteran Linda Merlin is on the front lines of the rollout. She serves as the veteran liaison at the local Elks Lodge and as a veterans advocate with Veterans Affinity, a nonprofit focused on helping older veterans.

"We look for the senior veterans to help them get their DD 214, their benefits, help get them a rating," Merlin said. "They're the ones that kind of got left out."

Before the remote claims station arrived, Merlin said, most Globe-area veterans had to travel 68 miles to Mesa for help, often without reliable transportation.

"If you're disabled and don't have a car, you're not going," she said. "You have to have a friend or a family member to take you down."

Now, on designated days, veterans can come to the Elks Lodge, grab coffee – and likely cookies – and sit down at a computer that links them directly with a DAV service officer.

On the Navajo Nation, where an estimated 30,000 veterans live on or near the reservation, leaders say the remote DAV system is answering a desperate need.

"From the data we collect from our Navajo Nation VA office,

that's the number they work with," said Dave Nez, chair of the Piñon Veteran Wellness Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. "This is veterans that live on Navajo Nation as well as off Navajo Nation, but they still come here for services."

He explains the new virtual connection helps in so many ways, even taking the large expense of traveling on a fixed income.

"The ones that want to take the burden to travel – a lot of times overnight and spend their own money – those are the ones that go to Prescott or down to Phoenix to start their claims," Nez said.

Bringing DAV claims workers in by video, he said, changes the equation. Veterans can now be scheduled in a series of appointments – 12:30, 1:00, 1:30 – without leaving their community. Nez said that is only the beginning.

"We'd like to really extend that to more advocacy as well," he said. "Once the paperwork is done and submitted, it's the follow-up that a lot of veterans don't really take the time and effort for. A lot of them are lost because they need interpreters, they need transportation, they need funding to travel."

For older Navajo veterans and widows, language barriers add another layer of difficulty. During one recent remote session, Nez watched as volunteers translated back and forth between English and Navajo so a widow could understand the survivor benefits she might be eligible for.

"Particularly the older veterans, they might be hard to hear, might have limited education," Nez said. "So, you repeat the questions, translate into Navajo and then back to English. That was happening here."

Nez said the wellness center concept his nonprofit is building goes beyond claims work. It is meant to address what he calls "insular veterans" – men and women who have returned home but remain emotionally and socially detached.

"These are veterans that are basically disconnected," he said. "They're still in their military mode, or they are isolated because of what they experienced. The reintegration process is difficult for them."

The center aims to become a resource hub and safe space, where veterans can rebuild trust, regain confidence, and reconnect with their communities.

"We want to find everyone and help them make that adjustment, build that confidence back up into the community and be more productive," Nez said. "They're full of knowledge and expertise, but it's just really bringing them back out gradually and kind of putting them back into the community as a normal person."

The Piñon Veteran Wellness Center was formally organized only in early January, but its founders say the need has been evident for years.

For Barton Hustin, a former Army military police soldier and reconnaissance specialist who served from 1989 to 2013, including two years in Iraq, the system's shortcomings are personal.

When he returned from combat in 2006, he said, he struggled with trauma and couldn't get along with anyone. Yet, on the Navajo Nation, there were virtually no local resources.

"We had zero – nothing. No benefits, nothing, claims worker, nothing," he said. "So, I started going off the reservation, here and there. Prescott, Carl T. Hayden, all that. It took me almost five years to get to 100%."

The constant travel, appointments and paperwork – often undertaken with his late wife – took a toll.



"It was really hard," he said. "But finally, I got it – 50, 70, and 100. They got me to where I couldn't work no more. Through VA, I cannot work. They pay me for it. They take care of me really good. So, I did that on myself."

That experience, he said, convinced him that a wellness center in Piñon was essential.

"We want it here," Hustin said. "Let's start from here. It was through me that this wellness center started. We found that it's a need. That's why we're at this point."

Asked if the new organization and remote claims access would save lives, Hustin didn't hesitate.

"Yes, sir," he said. "That's where we're at now. We're going to start getting what the veteran needs."

The group is seeking funding and grants to move from a modest beginning toward a fully equipped wellness center offering claims support, counseling connections, transportation coordination and a welcoming space for military families.

"Within the next few months, we're looking for funding that could become available so that we can give better services, improve what we have here," she said. "If somebody out there hears and says we do need this for the natives to come in and to heal, starting through here – that's what we're hoping."

For Andrew Simpson, an 80-year-old Native American Marine Corps veteran of Vietnam, the journey to full disability has also been long and unfinished.

"I came back fully alive, but not as good as I was when I went into the service," Simpson said. He has filed and refilled for years, reaching 90% but still short of 100%.

He and his wife now use two computers at home to help other veterans start the claims process and understand spousal benefits.

"A lot of times we'll try to help the people that haven't gotten their disability either," he said. "We need your help. We need Veterans Administration's help all over the world. That's what we need."

On the Navajo Nation, Saraphine Josley, president of the All Navajo Veterans Auxiliary, said her organization helped guide Nez and Hustin's group through the 501(c)(3) process because their missions were aligned.

She envisions a one-stop resource center not just for Navajo veterans, but for non-Native veterans married into Navajo families and for military families more broadly.

"There's no limit of who we can help," Josey said. "We'd like this to be a one-stop place where they can feel confident, secure, and safe that they can get help here."

Her group and the Piñon Veteran Wellness Center operate as what she called a "mirror image of the Red Cross," on call to respond when veterans or families need support.

READ MORE AT: <https://tinyurl.com/yccppx83>

Bulletin Board

Tsineeshjii' Naaltsoos Bídadiiljeehí

Jake Skeets' new poetry book offers world of hope amid changing climate

By Sarah Liese (Twillla)

Jake Skeets's new poetry book, *Horses*, examines the implications of climate change inside his tribal community and the relationship between the land and the body. While apocalyptic at times, *Horses* leaves the reader with a sense of hope about a new world's becoming.

Skeets is currently serving as the Poet Laureate for the Navajo Nation and is an associate professor at the University of Oklahoma. The book orients readers into a salient issue the tribal nation has faced for decades and is expected to continue experiencing: drought. It begins with a reckoning of nearly 200 horses found dead on the Navajo Nation in Arizona after getting stuck in a drying stock pond and becoming too weak to escape.

His first book of poems, *Eyes Bottle Dark with a Mouthful of Flowers*, won an American Book Award and the National Poetry Series – making *Horses* one of Literary Hub's Most Anticipated Books of 2026.

READ MORE: <https://tinyurl.com/49253xfu>



Roberto (Bear) Guerra

Jake Skeets is a member of the Navajo Nation and the author of two poetry books. He is the third Navajo Nation Poet Laureate.

NTU Collaboration with Sandia and Los Alamos Boosts Navajo Workforce Development

By Levi Rickert and Native News Online Staff Fri, April 24, 2026 at 5:41 AM MDT

Navajo Technical University (NTU), Sandia National Laboratories, and Los Alamos National Laboratory are expanding a long-standing partnership that is reshaping high-tech education and workforce development across the Navajo Nation.



What began more than a decade ago with a solar-powered wireless internet tower serving NTU's rural Crownpoint campus has grown into a wide-ranging collaboration in engineering, advanced manufacturing, microelectronics, cybersecurity, and environmental physics.

"For a long time, it felt like we were always at the back of the train when new resources and technologies came out," said Navajo Technical University President Elmer J. Guy. "By partnering with Sandia and Los Alamos, we've moved Navajo Technical University – and our students – up to the front. Our students are working on the same advanced equipment and research as peers at major universities, and they're bringing that expertise back to serve the Navajo Nation."

READ MORE: <https://bit.ly/4ud1atm>

PERSONNEL NEWS -- DCD Open Positions

Naanish aa 'idaat'ehigíí

Administrative Services Centers

Administrative Services Officer (S)	Kayenta, AZ	\$55,979.28	5/4/2026
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Torreón, NM	\$36,164.16	5/1/2026
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Low Mountain, AZ	\$36,164.16	5/1/2026
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Crystal, NM	\$36,164.16	5/6/2026
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Oak Springs, AZ	\$36,164.16	5/6/2026
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Pueblo Pintado, NM	\$36,164.16	5/7/2026
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Becenti, NM	\$36,164.16	5/7/2026
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Huerfano, NM	\$36,164.16	5/7/2026
Community Services Coordinator (S)	Red Valley, AZ	\$44,098.56	5/8/2026

Housing Improvement Program

Construction Inspector (S)	Fort Defiance, AZ	\$47,105.28	5/7/2026
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(OUF) Open Until Filled

(S) Sensitive Position (subject to background check)

Closing Dates may change

For the most up-to-date personnel info, please visit DPM's website at
<https://apply.navajo-nsn.gov/>

Quote of the Month

Saad BaꞤ Nitsáhakeesigíí

Comic of the Month

Baa Dlohasinigíí Naashch'aa'



U.S. Population Aging as Nation Turns 250

Women Still Outnumbered Men Among the Oldest, but Gap is Narrowing

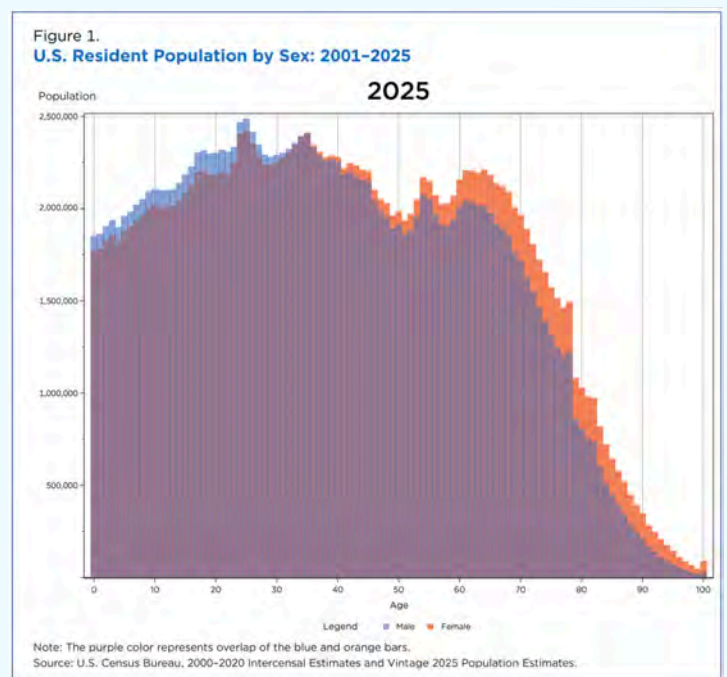
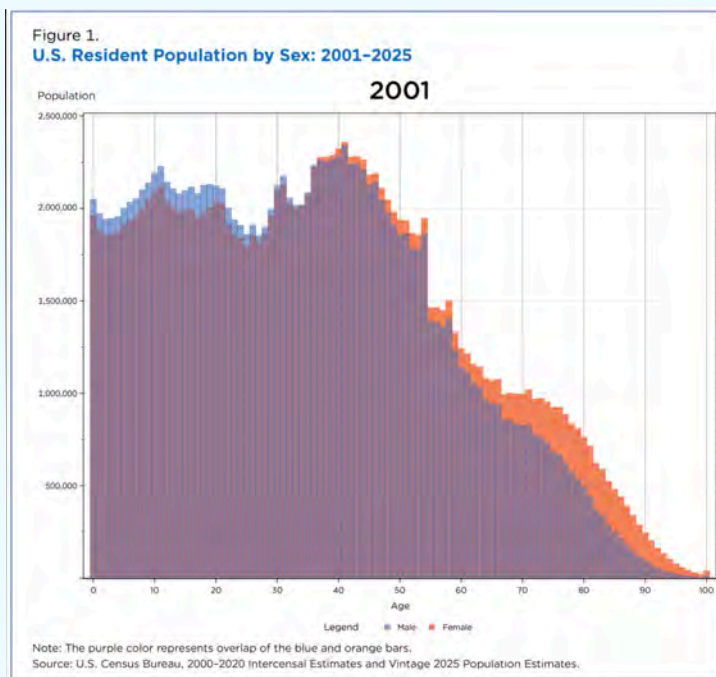
April 09, 2026

Written by: Luke T. Rogers and George M. Hayward

The nation turns 250 this year and Americans' median age – the age at which half of the population is younger and half is older – continues to rise, climbing from 39.2 in 2024 to 39.4 in 2025.

We use population estimates released today to examine changes in the U.S. age structure by sex from 2001, when the median age was 35.6, to 2025.

One striking shift is that while women continued to outnumber men at older ages, the gap between the sexes narrowed in the past 25 years (Figure 1).



In 2001, there were 70.6 males for every 100 females age 65 and older. By 2025, the ratio had increased substantially to 81.6.

The gap among those age 80 and older narrowed even more dramatically – from 50.9 males per 100 females in 2001 to 68.3 in 2025.

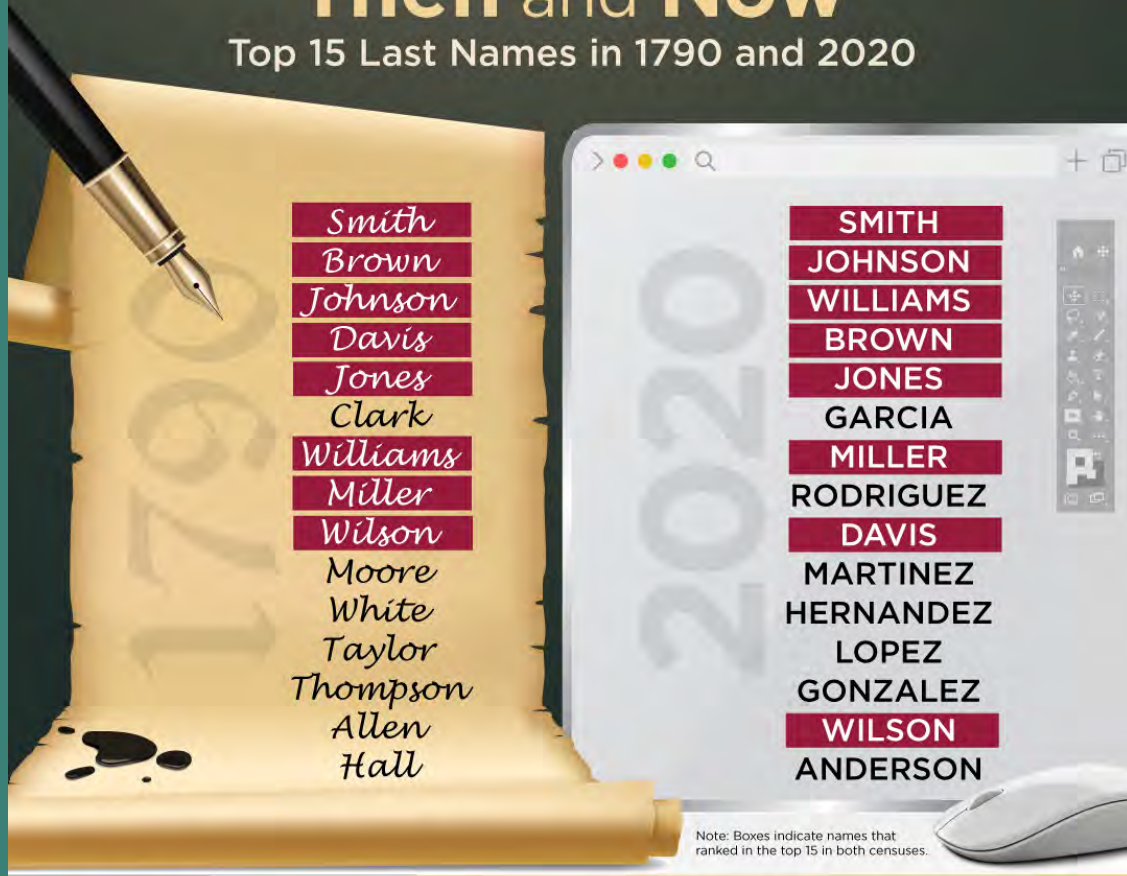
"Mortality rates for older men have been decreasing faster than for women and, as a result, men's share of the older population has increased," said Marc Perry, senior demographer in the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Division. "But the mortality gap between men and women is still there. In fact, the current mortality rate for men age 65 and older is roughly where the equivalent rate for women was 50 years ago."

According to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the age-adjusted death rate for males age 65 and older was 8,285.0 per 100,000 people in 1970. By 2022, it had dropped to 5,205.7, a decline of 3,079 deaths per 100,000.

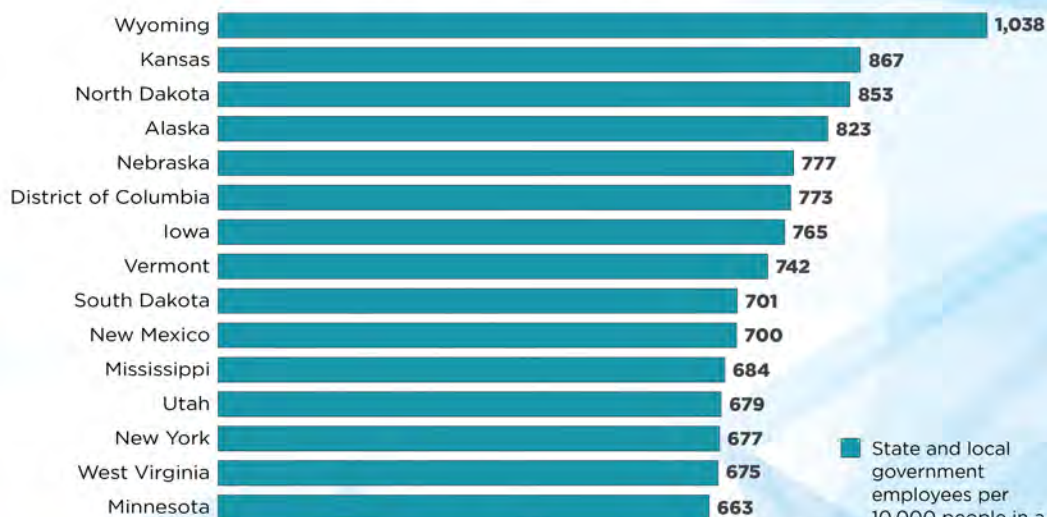
Female mortality also dropped, but not as rapidly. The death rate for females age 65 and older was 5,621.3 per 100,000 people in 1970 and 3,918.7 in 2022, a decline of 1,703 deaths per 100,000.

Then and Now

Top 15 Last Names in 1790 and 2020



Most Public Sector Employees Per 10,000 People: 2025



Note: Figures are rounded.





NAVAJO NATION DIVISION OF
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Get Ready, it's here!

COMMUNITY LAND USE PLANNING WEBSITE!!



What does the website entail?

- Community land use planning orientation video - you can now watch the orientation video virtually!
- Community land use planning documents:
 - Community Assessment Surveys
 - CLUPC Requirement listings
 - Title 26 of the NN Code, Section 2004; Community Based Land Use Plan; Land Use Variations
- Resources
 - Census 2020 Website
 - Map Request
- Community Land Use PowerPoint
- Technical Assistance Request link



Scan me!

TRASH SAFETY TIPS

Keep Our Community Clean & Safe

SAFE DISPOSAL PRACTICES

- Securely bag all trash before disposal.
- Don't overfill: ensure lids close fully
- Seal sharp objects in containers before disposal
- Keep hazardous waste out of regular trash



COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

- Report illegal dumping to officials
- Join community clean-ups
- Recycle and compost to reduce waste



BIN SAFETY

- Set bins on flat surfaces to prevent tipping
- Keep bins away from children.
- Don't climb or play on bins.
- Watch for trucks during service



REMEMBER

- A clean and safe community benefits you
- Do your part-handle trash responsibly

FOR QUESTIONS OR TO REPORT ILLEGAL DUMPING

Navajo Nation Division of Community Development- Solid Waste Management



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T'ááchil



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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