



## The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Navajo Nation takes position on BIA's Road Maintenance Budget Reduction**

*"The Navajo Nation stated that IRR Program funding will be placed in jeopardy of receiving future funds, because the 27,151 miles of BIA-owned roads cannot be properly maintained with just \$13 million in proposed annual funding."*

**VERONA, N.Y** — The Navajo Nation presented a resolution of the Intergovernmental Relations Committee of the 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council to the Tribal Budget Advisory Council, a resolution of the Navajo Nation's position on the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Road Maintenance Budget reduction on Wednesday, Aug. 13 in Verona, N.Y.

The Navajo Nation authorized the Transportation & Community Development Committee to advocate on behalf of the recommendations that were set forth in the position statement.

The Navajo Nation opposes the Fiscal Year 2009 Navajo Area Bureau of Indian Affairs' budget request, which proposes to reduce the road maintenance funding by 50 percent to \$13 million. This amount was based on the notion that there is tribal money available from the Department of Transportation, from which tribes may use up to 25 percent of the funds for road maintenance of Indian Reservations Roads (IRR), including those owned by the BIA.

Charles Long, legislative staff assistant for Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan, explained that Congress's intent was to allow the IRR Program construction funds to supplement the road maintenance funding and not to reduce those funds since they recognized that the BIA road maintenance funding was not adequate to carry out the intent.

According to the Navajo Nation's position statement, the reduction in the IRR program funding by 50 percent, the Interior Department is in violation of retaining primary responsibility for road maintenance — a responsibility of the BIA and not the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The Navajo Nation stated that IRR Program funding will be placed in jeopardy of receiving future funds, because the 27,151 miles of BIA-owned roads cannot be properly maintained with just \$13 million in proposed annual funding.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Nation Technical Information Service, from 1975 to 2002, the number of fatal motor vehicle crashes that occurred on roads within Indian reservations increased by 52.5 percent compared with a 2.2 percent decrease in auto fatalities in the rest of the nation.

With all these concerns and issues, the Interior Department's FY 2009 budget for BIA road maintenance is appalling and it will place the safety of roads on the Navajo Nation at a high risk.

It was explained that school bus transportation on the Navajo Nation will be greatly effected, as well as emergency ambulatory transportation and law enforcement vehicles.

The Navajo Nation is opposing the movement of this budget reduction by the BIA and is urging Congress to restore the budget to the original amount. This increase and restoration of funds will allow the Navajo Nation to continue its intent to contract the BIA Road Maintenance contractible functions, a program that greatly helps to maintain the roads on the Navajo Nation.