



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Nation Public Safety Committee applauds U.S. Senate amendment on public safety

Education efforts in Washington lead to crucial jail funding

WASHINGTON — The Public Safety Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council commends the U.S. Senate for adopting the Kyl-Thune Amendment, which provides \$2 billion to support Native American public safety and water projects. The bill passed the U.S. Senate today, July 16.

According to the bill, \$1 billion in funding will be earmarked for law enforcement and improved health care in Indian Country as well as \$1 billion for water projects on reservations across the nation.

The amendment was offered during consideration of S. 2731, a \$50 billion foreign assistance bill aimed at combating the spread of AIDS worldwide. Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) and Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) offered the amendment to ensure that the great needs in Indian Country are not neglected, while the U.S. seeks to help people in foreign countries.

Sen. Kyl stated on the Senate floor that, "Senator Thune and I have an amendment which would designate \$2 billion — \$1 billion for public safety, \$1 billion for drinking water — for Indians on reservations. Is that too much to ask, out of \$50 billion, that we take \$2 billion and authorize programs for public safety and water development on Indian reservations?"

The amendment authorizes \$750 million in public safety funding that will be divided up into various needed areas. Detention facility construction, rehabilitation and placement through the Justice Department will receive \$370 million. The Bureau of Indian Affairs' public safety and justice account, which funds tribal police and tribal courts, will receive \$310 million.

Investigations and prosecutions of crimes in Indian Country by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and U.S. Attorneys will receive \$30 million. The Justice Department's Office of Justice Program for Indian and Alaska Native Programs will receive \$30 million. Cross-deputization and other cooperative agreements between state, local and tribal governments will be funded at \$10 million.

Rex Lee Jim, chairman of the Public Safety Committee, responded minutes after receiving the news in Washington, D.C. "The Navajo Nation extends its greatest appreciation to Senator Kyl and the U.S. Senate for recognizing the enormous need for funding in Indian Country — especially for public safety."

Hope MacDonald-Lone Tree, former chair of the Public Safety Committee, who represents the To Nanees Dizi (Tuba City) and Coalmine Chapters said that "over the past several years, the Public Safety Committee has worked diligently to educate our senators and representatives about the public safety crisis on the Navajo Nation due to our lack of jail facilities."

"We are very grateful that Senator Kyl is leading the effort to fix this problem which has been neglected in the past," MacDonald-Lone Tree explained. "Our plea for solutions to the Navajo jail crisis has been heard and I am thankful that Congress is poised to provide significant funding for jail construction in Indian Country."

“Through regular visits with members of Congress, the White House, the Justice Department and congressional appropriations staff, the Public Safety Committee has consistently demonstrated a compelling case about our need for new facilities,” MacDonald-Lone Tree added. “I want to thank all the law enforcement and correctional officers, as well as the other Public Safety Committee members for their tireless effort to make our case in Washington.”

The consistent message of the Navajo Nation experiencing a crisis in law enforcement due to the lack of detention facilities was reiterated several times during the Congressional hearing. The Navajo Nation has a population of more than 300,000 spread over an area larger than the state of West Virginia. Detention facilities on the Navajo Nation have deteriorated so severely that prisoners can only be kept overnight in three of the six adult detention facilities.

Currently, the Navajo Nation only has 59 jail beds for the entire Navajo Nation; nearly all inmates serve only a portion of their sentence or not at all — all due to the lack of available detention facilities.

Delores Greyeyes, director of the Navajo Department of Corrections, said that “this is great news for the correctional officers, the police officers and all the people on the Navajo Nation. For too long, criminals on the Navajo Nation have received a “get out of jail free” card due to the lack of detention facilities.”

“The Public Safety Committee greatly appreciates Senator Kyl’s outstanding leadership in helping us provide needed jail facilities to stop the revolving door and help us protect Navajo people from violent offenders. We will continue to work with our senators and representatives to ensure that the final conference report includes vital funding for detention facility construction.”

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