



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Nation leads effort to secure funding for new tribal jails in Indian Country

Navajo Council members anticipate substantial funding for new jails

WASHINGTON — The Obama Administration and the U.S. Congress continue to be pressured by the Navajo Nation's Corrections Department and the Public Safety Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council to provide funding for new jails and for increased funding for all tribal public safety programs.

Recently, the Navajo Nation, the largest Indian reservation in the country with a population of more than 300,000 spread over an area larger than the state of West Virginia, filed five grant applications for new jails with the U.S. Department of Justice, according to Hope MacDonald Lonetree, member of the Public Safety Committee.

The committee has engaged in a comprehensive lobbying and public relations campaign effort for several years now to educate the U.S. Congress and the Administration about the public safety crisis on the Navajo Nation, this all due to deteriorating jails and insufficient funding for all areas of law enforcement.

The committee, led by its Chairman Rex Lee Jim (Rock Point), and former Chairwomen MacDonald Lonetree, have made many visits to Washington, D.C. and have held hundreds of meetings with elected members of Congress, their leadership and with senior officials from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Department of Justice, the federal Office of Management and Budget, and with the executives from the U.S. President's Office.

This effort is a result of the lack of detention facilities on the Navajo Nation. Detention facilities have deteriorated so severely that prisoners can only be kept overnight in three of the six adult detention facilities. With only 59 jails beds for the entire Nation, many inmates serve only a portion of their sentences.

On Feb. 17, the Navajo Nation was awarded \$225 million from the economic stimulus package for the Correctional Facilities on Tribal Lands grant program, this after a consistent lobbying campaign by members of the Public Safety Committee. The grant program, which is managed by the U.S. Justice Department, provides funding to help tribes construct and renovate correctional facilities on tribal lands, facilities used for the incarceration of offenders subject to tribal jurisdiction.

On May 4, the Navajo Nation Corrections Department, in coordination with the Public Safety Committee, submitted applications to the U.S. Department of Justice for five new jails for the Navajo Nation. The committee is now eagerly waiting the announcement of the grant award winners—expected later this month.

Jim appreciates the acknowledgement from the federal government.

"The Public Safety Committee is very pleased that both the U.S. Congress and the Obama Administration have responded to our consistent message that tribal jails desperately need resources to protect our people from violent offenders," Jim said. "The funding for new jails in the Recovery Act serves as a signal to Indian Country, specifically the Navajo Nation, that this Congress and the Administration recognize the public safety crisis we have endured for far too long and finally plan to honor the government's trust responsibility and its treaty obligations."

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On July 30, 2008, the work of the committee paid off as the U.S. Congress adopted the Kyl-Thune Amendment, which provided \$1 billion in funding for law enforcement and \$1 billion for water projects on reservations across the Nation. The emergency fund for Indian Country was approved during consideration of a \$50 billion foreign assistance bill aimed at combating the spread of AIDS worldwide. At that time, U.S. Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ) and Sen. John Thune (R-SD) offered the amendment to ensure that while the U.S. seeks to help people in foreign countries, it must not neglect the great needs in Indian Country here at home.

The Kyl-Thune amendment authorized \$750 million in public safety funding, including \$370 million for detention facility construction, rehabilitation and placement through the U.S. Justice Department, \$310 million for the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Public Safety and Justice account, which funds tribal police and tribal courts. In addition, \$30 million was authorized for investigations and prosecutions of crimes in Indian Country by the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the U.S. Attorneys.

Currently, the Public Safety Committee continues to lead the fight to provide appropriations for the Emergency Fund in FY'2010. The committee recently met with Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ) and Congressman Ben Lujan (D-NM) to send a joint letter to the Appropriations Committee encouraging funding for the Emergency Plan. The committee plans to continue working with congressional members and with Sen. Kyl and other senators to ensure appropriations are provided for the Emergency Fund in FY'10.

In addition, the committee was also successful in securing a substantial increase in appropriations for the Bureau of Indian Affairs' public safety budget. The U.S. House of Representatives approved the FY'10 Interior Appropriations Bill, which included \$303 million for public safety and justice programs in the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"The burden on our police officers, prosecutors and judges has been significant without a facility to hold and incarcerate violent individuals," MacDonald Lonetree said. "New facilities will have an enormous impact in keeping families, communities and our Nation safe. Law and order will be restored and healing can finally begin."

Raymond Joe, member of the committees stated, "Our congressional members have recognized the lack of jails that have undermined public safety on the Navajo Nation that put our people at risk. We look forward to continuing our work with our congressional leaders as well as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Department of Justice to put shovels in the ground and begin building the much-needed detention facilities on the Navajo Nation."

Delores Greyeyes, director for the Navajo Corrections Department, said, "We are so grateful for the leadership of our elected officials, especially those members of Congress that represent the Navajo Nation. It is very satisfying to know we were heard and that the Nation finally has real hope of building modern facilities."

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