



## The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Navajo Nation advocates for healthcare facility for veterans at national conference in Calif.**

*"We know first hand the problems of traveling long distances to get to grocery stores and to healthcare facilities." — Cecilia Sandoval, a Navajo woman veteran from Chinle, Ariz.*

**CABAZON, Calif.** — Members of the Human Services Committee of the 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council and representatives from the Navajo Department of Veterans Affairs attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> "Honoring our Warriors" Conference on March 19-21 to discuss issues related to Native American veterans.

The three-day conference, hosted by the National American Indian Veterans Inc. and the Morongo Band of Mission Indians, attracted presenters from more than 30 different tribes from throughout the United States.

The organization serves American Indians in the armed forces and was recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as a voice of American Indians, including: Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians and American Samoans at the federal level.

Navajo Nation representatives included: Young Jeff Tom (Mariano Lake/Smith Lake), Larry Noble (Jeddito/Steamboat/Low Mountain), Elbert R. Wheeler (Many Farms/Round Rock), George Apachito (Alamo), David Shondee (Chilchinbeto/Kayenta) and Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley Jr. The Navajo delegation attended the conference to take advantage of opportunities to advocate their concerns regarding the need to improve services for its veterans.

Navajo Council Delegate Young Jeff Tom, vice chairman of the Human Services Committee of the Navajo Nation Council, knows the challenges of seeking veterans' services and he advocates the needs of the Navajo Nation.

"Our Navajo veterans are in dire need of services," Tom explained. "As a tribal legislator and as a member of the Human Services Committee, we realize the great need of our veterans. We continue to listen to them and we continue to advocate for increased and improved services, despite the federal budget shortfalls."

The Navajo delegation presented three resolutions to the national committee requesting their support.

Elbert Wheeler and Leo Chischilly, department manager for Navajo Veterans Affairs, proposed the resolutions. The first resolution requested support in obtaining funding for the establishment of a veterans' cemetery on the Navajo Nation on 20 acres in Chinle, Ariz.

The second resolution requested support in establishing a community-based outpatient clinic on the Navajo Nation.

"Our veterans have to travel 600 miles one way to get to the nearest veterans' clinic," Chischilly explained. "We hope to have the support of the National American Indian Veterans organization to help establish one on the Navajo Nation, a clinic where veterans can go to get treated."

Cecilia Sandoval, a Navajo woman veteran from Chinle, Ariz. and chair of the California Department of Veterans Affairs, knows the challenges of seeking veterans' services first hand, especially for women and minorities.

"Being that we are the largest Indian Nation, we know first hand the problems of traveling long distances to get to grocery stores and to healthcare facilities," said Sandoval.

Sandoval made reference to the low rate of women seeking veterans services and explained surveys indicate there are two groups of veterans who fail to use benefits — women and minorities.

A third resolution requested support of awarding a Congressional Medal of Honor to Mr. Huskie Y.B. Ten. Mr. Ten was awarded a silver Medal of Honor after his patrol was ambushed and left him wounded in the line of duty. His actions saved many lives and Joey Strickland, director of Veterans Affairs in Arizona, supports this resolution.

"I believe he deserves a Congressional Medal of Honor and we are seeking the support of the National American Indian Veterans organization," said Strickland.

The three resolutions passed unanimously. According to Strickland, the resolutions will now proceed forward to congressional delegates and onto the U.S. Department of Defense for further consideration and review.

Tom also explained that the Human Services Committee is working on the Navajo Veterans Act, tribal legislation that will be presented to the Navajo Nation Council to unify the advocacy efforts of most of the independently operated agency veterans' organizations throughout the Navajo Nation.

"Our veterans have many needs and our voices will be even stronger if all agencies work together to advocate as one," Tom said. "Right now, the five agencies are requested to send comments back to the Human Services Committee to be presented to the Office of the Speaker, our efforts are moving forward and veterans are getting closer to becoming one strong voice for the Navajo Nation."

Another featured speaker was Keith Little, a Navajo Code Talker and president of the Navajo Code Talkers Association.

Little, whose speech attracted a lot of attention, was honored during the conference and talked about his experience as a Code Talker during WWII and how the code brought advantages to the U.S. military. He also took the opportunity to seek support for funds to help build a Navajo Code Talkers Museum planned for a location east of Window Rock, Ariz.

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