



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Nation presents budget priorities for FY 2011 to Tribal Budget Advisory Council, U.S. Department of the Interior

WASHINGTON — A Navajo delegation attended the quarterly meeting of the Tribal Budget Advisory Council hosted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Department of the Interior to present its budget priorities for Fiscal Year 2011 on May 11-13 in Washington.

Navajo Council Delegate Rex Lee Jim represented Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan, while Arbin Mitchell, division director for the Navajo Division of Community Development, represented Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley Jr. as the two representatives from the Navajo BIA Region.

In a message sent to the advisory council, Speaker Morgan urged continued cooperation and strengthening of a government-to-government relationship.

"The U.S. Government has a trust responsibility to the Navajo Nation," he said. "We must continue that cooperation as we move forward in working with a new administration and a new Congress."

President Shirley stated a similar message in a letter reaffirming the Navajo Nation's long-standing government-to-government relationship with the federal government.

"A central piece of the government-to-government relationship is the trust responsibility that exists between the U.S. Government and the Navajo people, and the responsibility of the federal government to fund Navajo Nation needs," stated President Shirley.

Six major priorities of the Navajo Nation were presented, based upon an objective assessment of its budget justification and projected needs of the economic and social developmental needs of its people. The FY 2011 budget priorities for the Navajo Nation includes increased funding for public safety and justice, economic and community development, education, natural resource management, human services and contract support.



The Navajo Nation presented its budget priorities for FY 2011 to the Tribal Budget Advisory Council and the U.S. Department of the Interior May 11-14, 2009, in Washington. Right photo, Rex Lee Jim, Navajo Council delegate, makes his presentation. (Photo by Joshua Lavar Butler)



Public safety, the Navajo Nation's top priority, garnered much attention with a request of \$40,338,261 as Rex Lee Jim, chairman of the Public Safety Committee of the Navajo Nation Council, explained requested funds will provide services for five agencies located in seven police districts across the sprawling 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.

With an eye opening ratio of 0.06 percent Navajo police officers per 1,000 people with no adequate jail facilities to house inmates, the Navajo Nation struggles to keep its people safe and desperately needs funds for law enforcement, criminal investigations and for corrections to help its public safety program, which suffers the lowest law enforcement officers per capita, far less than any other tribe in the country.

Amongst its other needs, Navajo requested funding for its overworked judicial system, specifically its tribal courts in the amount of \$4.9 million.

Another request in the amount of \$2,561,906 for various economic and community development projects was made, including 4,563 miles of new public roads and \$4,498,645 for safe, decent and sanitary homes for 65 families – a small fraction of homes needed on the reservation.

Arbin Mitchell reported more than 2,000 Navajos apply for housing assistance every year and the Navajo Nation struggles as funds continue to be decreased every year. In FY 2007, 626 eligible applicants applied for assistance with only 44 projects being completed with a budget allocation of \$2.6 million. In FY 2008, 676 eligible applicants applied with 47 projects completed within the confines of \$1.5 million budget.

Assistance for development of the former Bennett Freeze-area and its recovery plan to assist nine chapter communities affected in the far-western portion of the Navajo Nation was made in the amount of \$13,452,428 as well.

The rising cost of college tuition for Navajo students and the increase for educational funding assistance also prompted tribal leaders to request more funds for its scholarship program and its higher educational institutions.

Despite a struggling scholarship system that denied 65,273 students from 2001 to 2008, it was reported 29 Navajo students received doctorate degrees, 129 received master's degrees and 266 Navajo students received bachelor's degrees in 2008-2009 – a count of scholarship recipients only.

Another important program, Johnson O'Malley, which provides important services for individual educational plans for students, parents and schools, was also included as a budget priority for the Navajo Nation. The Department of the Interior was urged to restore base funding at \$3.4 million per year for the program.

Other requests included funds for welfare assistance, social services, the Indian Child Welfare Act Unit, the Navajo Treatment Center, the Navajo Department of Water Resources, Minerals Department, Navajo Forest Department, Navajo Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Navajo Land Department, Navajo Agricultural Products Industry, Navajo Abandoned Mines and Historic Preservations.

Speaker Morgan praised Rex Lee Jim and Arbin Mitchell for representing the Navajo Nation on behalf of the Speaker and President Shirley.

"The Navajo Nation's priorities represent efforts to promote safe Navajo communities and educational opportunities," Speaker Morgan said. "The Navajo Nation strongly believes that a safe and educated workforce willing to conduct commerce with the rest of America is vital in our efforts to raise our standards of living. It will take cooperation from all governmental agencies and we must continue discussions and strategizing with all involved entities."

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