



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Council delegates participate in motorcycle honor ride to Washington to honor Native American warriors, strengthen veterans' advocacy efforts

OKMULGEE, Okla. — The annual Navajo Nation Honor Ride to Washington began on Sunday, May 17, to honor Native American warriors and to strengthen partnerships for veterans' advocacy efforts.

Several Navajo Nation Council delegates are making the long trek across the United States to meet with congressional representatives and to attend various events during Memorial Day weekend beginning on Friday, May 22.

Council delegates include:

Ray Berchman (Oak Springs/St. Michaels); Roy Laughter (Chilchinbeto/Kayenta); LoRenzo C. Bates (Upper Fruitland), Raymond Maxx (Coalmine Canyon/Toh Nanees Dizi), Curran Hannon (Oak Springs/St. Michaels) and Omer Begay Jr. (Cornfields/Greasewood Springs/Klagetoh/Wide Ruins).

Apache County Sherriff Joseph Dedman and Frank Dayish Jr., former Navajo Nation vice-president joined the Navajo delegation as well.

The delegation, led by LoRenzo C. Bates, plan to spend time advocating for veterans' issues and to present a position statement to congressional representatives regarding current Navajo veterans' issues.

"It frustrates the Navajo Nation when the implementation of any legislation enacted by Congress doesn't benefit the Navajo people to the extent that we would like to see it," Bates said. "I'm hoping this trip will relieve the frustration that we have as Navajos in terms of getting those benefits and opportunities to our people."



The annual Navajo Nation Honor Ride to Washington began May 17, 2009, with several Navajo Council delegates participating to honor Native American warriors and to strengthen partnerships for veterans' advocacy efforts. Left photo, Navajo Council Delegate LoRenzo C. Bates. Bottom photo, Navajo Council Delegate Roy Laughter. (Photo by Christian Bigwater)



Meetings are scheduled with Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick, D-AZ, and Congressman Ben R. Luján, D-NM, on Friday, May 22, to review position statements from the Navajo Nation. The statement covers seven needs among Navajo veterans and it presents recommendations of how to address the needs.

First, the statement advocates for a community-based outpatient clinic. Currently, no Veteran's Administration medical facilities are available on the Navajo Nation. The nearest facility, on average, is six to eight hours one-way and is costly for patients traveling there. The Navajo Nation requests the Federal Veterans Association's support and approval to establish an outpatient facility for rural veterans living on trust land within the Navajo Nation.

Second, the Navajo Nation is advocating for support of a veterans cemetery. Currently, no official veterans' cemetery has been established on the Navajo Nation, except for the community veterans' cemetery in Fort Defiance Ariz. — which is full to capacity. Navajo recommends Frank Salvias, director of the States Cemetery Grants Service, make a visit to a proposed area in Chinle, Ariz., and provide guidance and assistance when Navajo submits its grant application.

Third, Navajo advocates for cost reimbursement for military funeral honor services. Current law requires an eligible veteran receiving a military funeral be provided an honors ceremony, which includes the presentation of a U.S. burial flag and the playing of taps. The statement recommends the establishment of an intergovernmental agreement with the U.S. Veterans Administration and the U.S. Department of Defense to provide military funeral honor services for families of deceased veterans on a reimbursement arrangement for travel and transportation costs on the Navajo Nation.

Fourth, the statement advocates for a claims benefit counselor from the Veterans Administration. Navajo requests three benefits counselors to assist in rural areas with services to veterans on the Navajo Nation.

Fifth, Navajo requests funding for a new building for the Navajo Division of Diné Veterans Services. The statement requests the assistance of the director of the Arizona Department of Veterans Services and the Arizona State Legislature for state appropriations in the amount of \$5 million for the planning, design and construction of a new facility planned for Window Rock, Ariz.

Sixth, Navajo advocates for the enhancement and increased use of telemedicine technology at the Chinle Veterans Center and at Indian Health Service facilities on the Navajo Nation. Such enhancements would help veterans in rural areas establish communication with their physicians, nurses and mental health counselors.

Lastly, the statement advocates for homes for veterans and recommends federal and state agencies create partnerships with the Navajo Nation. Currently, immediate family members provide care for elderly veterans in homes that lack electricity, telephones, running water, sewage systems and paved roads — challenges that make care extremely difficult.

The motorcycle honor riders are expected in Washington D.C. on Friday, May 22.

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