



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Public Safety Committee applauds Recovery Act Grants for Navajo jails

U.S. Department of Justice announces grants to build three new jails on Navajo Nation

WASHINGTON – The Public Safety Committee of the Navajo Nation Council is pleased to announce the federal government will provide a total of \$74 million to construct three new jails on the Navajo Nation.

These funds were released by the U.S. Department of Justice through the Correctional Facilities on Tribal Lands Program as a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The grants will allow the Navajo Nation to construct correctional facilities in Tuba City, Ariz., Kayenta, Ariz. and Ramah, NM, for the incarceration of offenders subject to tribal jurisdiction.

The Navajo Nation received more than one-third of the total amount provided for tribal jails and the \$38 million for the Tuba City facility is the largest single grant announced by the Justice Department.

"The Public Safety Committee is elated that stimulus funds will help make our community safer by constructing modern jails that will provide a realistic deterrent to crime on the Navajo Nation," said Rex Lee Jim, chairman of the Public Safety Committee.

The Navajo Nation is currently experiencing a crisis in law enforcement due to the lack of detention facilities. Detention facilities have deteriorated so severely that prisoners can only be kept overnight in three of six adult detention facilities. There are only 59 jail beds for the entire Navajo Nation; many inmates serve only a portion of their sentences due to the lack of available detention facilities.

The announcement of the grants for three new jails will dramatically improve the ability of the Navajo Nation to combat crime and ensure Navajo police officers, prosecutors and judges have the facilities necessary to remove dangerous offenders from the streets.

Since 2003, the Public Safety Committee led the effort in Washington educating the U.S. Congress, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Office of Management and Budget, the U.S. Department of Justice and the media about the dangerous situation in Indian Country due to the lack of adequate detention facilities.

In 2004, Hope MacDonald LoneTree, member and former chair of the Public Safety Committee, testified before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee about the crisis on the Navajo Nation and across Indian Country caused by the lack of adequate detention facilities.

MacDonald LoneTree and other members of the committee continuously worked to educate Congress for several years about serious problems in public safety during hundreds of meetings with Congressional members and the federal executive branch.

"Our message was simple and effective: the lack of detention facilities on the Navajo Nation is creating a public safety emergency for Navajo people and their communities. And now, we have \$74 million for three new jails on the

Navajo Nation," said Raymond Joe, vice chairman of the Public Safety Committee. "This is a great victory for the public safety of all Navajo people."

The Justice Department's decision to fund three grant applications submitted by the Navajo Nation is a credit to the diligent efforts of the Navajo Nation Department of Corrections. The Department of Corrections worked in close coordination with the committee through extensive lobbying efforts in Washington to encourage appropriations for the Correctional Facilities on Tribal Lands Program and during the grant preparation process.

Delores Greyeyes, director of Navajo Nation Corrections, stated, "I am extremely pleased that the U.S. Department of Justice recognized the great need for new detention facilities on the Navajo Nation. This monumental announcement is the result of the hard work and close cooperation between the Public Safety Committee and the Navajo Department of Corrections. It is great news for the public safety of all Navajo people. I am delighted our joint efforts have been rewarded and the Navajo Nation will finally build modern detention facilities that will stop the revolving door and allow our families, police officers, prosecutors and judges to see a realistic deterrent to crime."

"These funds will create many jobs during the construction of the new facilities, and provide increased job opportunities in the public safety and criminal justice system. The announcement of these grants serves as a signal to Indian Country—specifically the Navajo Nation—that this Congress and Administration recognize the public safety crisis we have endured for far too long," MacDonald LoneTree said. "It is a statement for tribal self-determination and self-sufficiency to insure our sovereignty and to provide peace of mind to those that live within our borders. Now, the victims of crime and our innocent children can feel safe and protected from violent individuals who have wreaked havoc on our neighborhoods and our communities."

"Many thanks to all those who helped us, I want to especially thank our women and men of law enforcement, and corrections for providing extraordinary service despite the lack of facilities and adequate resources," MacDonald LoneTree added. "These funds were not easily acquired, we battled political opposition and limited funds. However, with persistence, determination and truth we all succeeded—Ahe'hee!"

The committee thanks the efforts of congressional members that supported jail funding as well, they include Sens. Jon Kyl (R-AZ); Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), and Tom Udall (D-NM) and Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ); Congressman Ben R. Lujan (D – NM) and former Congressman Rick Renzi (R-AZ).

The committee also thanks Tripp Funderburk, lead lobbyist for The Livingston Group, who provided legislative expertise.

The congressional representatives that represent the Navajo Nation have recognized the lack of jails has undermined public safety within the Navajo Nation and they have worked diligently to help secure the funding for the new jails. The Navajo Nation would not have received vital jail grants without the leadership and genuine concern for public safety in Indian Country demonstrated by Congressman Alan B. Mollohan (D-WV); Norman Dicks (D-WA); Sen. John Thune (R-SD) and Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-ND).

The Navajo Nation looks forward to its continued working relationship with Congressional leaders, as well as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and officials from the Department of Justice to put shovels in the ground and begin building the much needed detention facilities on the Navajo Nation. The committee's work does not end; there are still many Navajo communities in need of manpower and facilities. The Public Safety and Judiciary Committees will build on this important funding and will continue making improvements for the Navajo people.

Members of the committee include: Chairman Rex Lee Jim, Vice Chairman Raymond Joe, Hope MacDonald LoneTree, Benjamin Curley, Edmund Yazzie, Kee Yazzie Mann and Elmer P. Begay.

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