



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Delegate Crotty participates in panel discussion regarding child sexual assault, abuse, and abduction



Photo: Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty and panel participants discuss the promotion of awareness to prevent sexual assault and abuse of children at a roundtable discussion at San Juan Chapter on Aug. 18, 2016.

FRUITLAND, N.M. – On Thursday evening at San Juan Chapter, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz’t’l’í) participated in a roundtable discussion entitled, “Keeping Our Children Safe,” sponsored by the Diné Women’s Forum, a non-profit organization that focuses on promoting and creating awareness of Diné women issues.

Delegate Crotty was invited to sit on the panel, which included Navajo leaders, educators, health workers, and social service advocates to discuss the implementation of an Amber Alert system on

the Navajo Nation, and provided an update to the forum regarding the Navajo government's role in developing the system.

"We need to start believing that [sexual assault and abuse] is happening in our communities and in our families. This might be where the most critical dialogue starts because we have individuals from a variety of sectors and we can work together collaboratively. I share your frustration with the Amber Alert system," said Delegate Crotty.

She added that the Navajo Nation currently implemented a task force that is actively working on implementing an Amber Alert system on Navajo land, and that the state of New Mexico has offered to work across borders to fund and coordinate the system for areas in Navajo including Arizona and Utah. The task force has been working diligently on telecommunication issues to ensure the system is efficient once it is been implemented, said Delegate Crotty.

Yolanda Francisco-Nez, moderator of the roundtable discussion and board chair of the Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault, said the purpose of the panel discussion is to bring to light the issues of protecting children from sexual assault, sexual abuse, and abduction to prevent tragedies, such as the incident in May in which 11-year old Ashlynnne Mike, a member of the Navajo Nation, was abducted, assaulted, and murdered.

"It was [Ashlynnne Mike's] mom who said to me on more than one occasion, if Navajo land had an Amber Alert system, her little baby girl [Ashlynnne] may still be alive today," said Francisco-Nez. "How can we create the awareness among the Navajo people? In this work of awareness and prevention, it takes more than one person. It takes multiple parties to work together to create an Amber Alert system that is full and comprehensive."

Also participating in the roundtable discussion was Gary Mike, the father of Ashlynnne, who said it was important for parents and families to talk to their children to prevent further tragedies, and added that school systems need to educate children more efficiently on safety. He added that it is important to have community involvement from surrounding chapters.

"All the communities need to come out and bring ideas on how to keep all our children safe. The Amber Alert system was supposed to have been implemented over 10 years ago, and we still don't hear updates on it. We need to get our leaders on the ball about this, and I think we should have more forums like this to get their attention. That's what I want to bring to the table tonight," said Mike.

Delegate Crotty, who also serves as chairwoman for the Naabik'iyáti' Committee's Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee, commended everyone involved with the panel discussion and thanked Mike for his participation to promote awareness.

"I want to thank [Gary Mike] for being open to this conversation. What little belief or trust you have in the Navajo Nation, please know we are trying our best to prioritize this issue. We now

have a subcommittee to address the problems, and are now receiving the documentation to begin working on solutions.”

Other panelists that participated in the roundtable discussion included Fannie Mae Atcitty, Alana Kindness, N.M. State Rep. Sharon Clahchishchilliage, Ramona Begay, Paula Claymore, and Rena Scott.

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