



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **Health, Education, and Human Services Committee addresses issues regarding Chilchinbeto Community School accreditation**

**MONUMENT VALLEY, Utah** – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report from the Chilchinbeto Community School Board and administration on issues regarding accreditation of the school and negative publicity.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), who represents the community, said the accreditation of Chilchinbeto Community School is set to expire on January 31, 2017 and would not affect the operation of the school and its programs.

“Although the school was recommended to have its accreditation withdrawn, this does not affect the schools program and operations. There has been a rumor regarding the closure of the school, but that is simply not true,” said Delegate Brown. “The main thing we want to let everyone know is the accreditation issue did not affect funding of the school and will not affect it in the future.”

He added that because of the closure rumors, the enrollment of students at the school decreased dramatically from 160 students to 65 students.

The school’s accreditation is not required for K-8 classes, however, high schools are required to be accredited to assure colleges and universities that high school students who graduate have met all requirements to pursue higher education, said Delegate Brown.

According to the accrediting entity AdvancED, the Chilchinbeto Community School is able to reinstate its accreditation if the school submits a \$25,000 bond, or they may appeal the decision to be reinstated, which would cost approximately \$1,750.

Delegate Brown said that the Chilchinbeto Community School Board reassumed control of the school this year after the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education had taken over about two years ago and stated that DODE was the cause for the loss of accreditation due to poor management and the hiring of an unqualified program manager.

“I am grateful for the active school board members, because their intentions has always been for the good of the students at Chilchinbeto Community School. However, we need to hold DODE

accountable for the loss of accreditation and I recommend that they absorb the costs associated with reinstatement,” said Delegate Brown.

In addition to Delegate Brown’s recommendation, he also suggested a directive to committee members that a performance audit be carried out for the time that DODE was in control of the school, as well as to assess the school’s current administration to identify the issues from both standpoints.

EHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the elementary school deserved due process for the loss of its accreditation, and that the committee will aid the board in developing policies to address issues stemming from the proposed audits, and will continue to monitor the situation until it has been rectified.

EHSC members voted 2-0 with one directive to accept the report.

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**Navajo Nation Council**  
**July 20, 2016**

Thank you Speaker Bates, for that introduction.

I have had the opportunity to meet with many of you in Washington and in New Mexico. But it is my privilege to address the full council today.

Congress has a solemn obligation to work with tribes on a government-to-government basis. And I have been proud to stand with you for many years working as partners on issues important to the Navajo Nation.

I am a member of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee and the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations subcommittee, which sets funding for the Interior Department. Including almost all tribal programs.

I have fought – and will continue to fight – for greater investment in our Native communities. And I appreciate the opportunity to share some of what I am doing in Washington to promote issues important to the Navajo Nation.

It is often said that we live in challenging times. And that we do. The current political climate does not help much. Our government needs less name-calling, and more problem-solving.

Accomplishing anything in this gridlocked Congress is a big feat. But fortunately, we have defied the odds and seen some real successes that will benefit the Navajo people.

***[TSCA]***

Last month, Congress passed – and the president signed into law – my bipartisan bill. It reforms the nation's broken chemical safety law – the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976, or TSCA.

Some have called this the most important environmental law to pass Congress in decades because it fixes a broken 40-year-old law and because it will have widespread impact in industry, our communities and on the Navajo Nation.

TSCA was supposed to protect our communities from dangerous chemicals. But it didn't. And over the last 40 years, the government allowed hundreds of chemicals to go on the market – each year – without being tested for safety and without regulation.

This included chemicals in everyday products – products that we know cause cancer or are linked to diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, birth defects and other serious health conditions.

Our new law will require the government to test all of the hundreds of new chemicals manufactured each year – before they go on the market. And, it will have to test the 85,000 existing chemicals – starting with the ones we know are dangerous. It will do this for the first time in 40 years.

I hope it will mean that chemicals like asbestos, formaldehyde, flame retardants and BPA are banned or regulated in short order so that people are no longer at risk.

This is a huge victory – especially for pregnant women, infants, the elderly and people who work around chemicals because they are the most at risk for health problems.

But, it’s also a victory for people in rural and low-income communities who often don’t have access to organic or safe products because those products are too expensive or simply aren’t available.

Safety and good health are **NOT** only for the well-off. We should not be manufacturing products that put people in danger. Period.

And our new chemical safety law will finally protect the people on the Navajo Nation – and across the country.

### ***[Indian Tribal Energy Development and Self Determination Act]***

Another success was passage in the Senate of the Indian Tribal Energy Development and Self-Determination Act Amendments of 2015. This bill was added to a broader energy bill that we’re working to pass through Congress this year.

It will give the Navajo Nation more control over the development of your resources. This will help create jobs and economic development.

### ***[Navajo Gallup pipeline]***

And, we passed into law the Navajo Water Settlement Technical Corrections Act.

Thanks to the Navajo-Gallup water settlement that we passed in 2009, the Navajo Nation is benefiting from water development projects. But, the original bill was poorly written. It crippled the Bureau of Reclamation. And prevented it from providing water infrastructure in parts of the Navajo-Gallup project.

Jackson Brossy – from the Navajo Washington Office – testified in Congress about the corrections act.

Before the settlement, 33 percent of Navajos still had to haul water to their homes. Now, each year, we move closer to having access to a dependable water supply.

It is unacceptable that – in the 21st century in the United States of America – residents of any area of our country don't have access to running water. These projects will go a long way toward rectifying that horrible situation.

And I am proud to stand with you as we continue to make progress.

### ***[Uranium Cleanup and RECA]***

When it comes to water and the environment, the Navajo Nation has faced many challenges.

The Navajo people have been on the receiving end of devastating environmental disasters brought on by the federal government and others for far too long.

My family and I have long fought alongside the Navajo people for environmental justice. And I continue to do so.

We need to expand the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act to include those who were left out of the original act, including post-1971 uranium workers in Northwestern New Mexico.

I am leading a bipartisan group of senators pushing to amend RECA to add these groups.

In my position on the Appropriations Committee, I'm also pushing to move aggressively on uranium cleanup.

Last Saturday, the Red Water Pond Community near Church Rock, New Mexico, marked the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the uranium tailings spill. It was the largest accidental radiation release in U.S. history. I am very sorry that I wasn't able to be at the event.

The U.S. government entered into a settlement two years ago to clean up the abandoned uranium mines in the Navajo Nation. It was the largest environmental enforcement recovery – ever – by the Justice Department. Over \$1 billion dollars is going to clean up 50 mines in and around the Navajo Nation and to address radioactive waste left at the mill in Shiprock.

But, there are over 500 abandoned uranium mines scattered across the Navajo Nation.

We still don't know the full scope of contamination. It remains a monumental injustice. And I will closely follow the progress of cleanup conducted with these funds – and continue the fight until the job is done.

In April, I put the EPA Administrator – Gina McCarthy – on notice. I am unhappy about how long cleanup at the Church Rock Mine is scheduled to take. We have heard it might not begin until 2020 – and may take seven to nine years to finish.

She said she will do her best to speed up the process. And I will hold her to that.

### ***[Gold King Mine Spill]***

In the West, our rivers are a lifeline. This is especially true for the Navajo people.

The San Juan River is crucial.

Almost a year ago, the Gold King Mine accident sent toxic pollution coursing through the Animas and San Juan rivers – through San Juan County, New Mexico, and the Navajo Nation.

The spill was an accident. But the EPA made several serious mistakes. And the EPA owes it to the Navajo Nation to make things right.

Last summer, I visited the area. I met with President Begaye, Speaker Bates, Attorney General Branch, Gilbert Harrison, Chili Yazzie and others.

I saw the terrible impact that this spill was having on farms and on the spirit of the people.

I introduced the Gold King Mine Spill Recovery Act of 2015.

Our bill requires the EPA to compensate those who were impacted. And it requires the agency to work with the states and the Navajo Nation to fund and implement long-term water quality monitoring.

I am pushing on this. The EPA has so far made \$2 million dollars available for long-term monitoring but that is not nearly enough.

I'm also very disappointed at how long it has taken the EPA to process reimbursements. People impacted by the accident must be made whole. It has been almost a year. And that is way too long.

I have been in frequent communication with both the Navajo Nation and the EPA to keep pushing to resolve these issues.

The Senate Appropriations Committee gives me a strong position to fight for recovery and monitoring.

Last year, I passed into law a measure that will help hold the EPA accountable – and ensure it upholds its commitment to prioritizing transparent water quality monitoring.

This year, I included language in the Fiscal Year 2017 Senate appropriations bill. It requires the EPA to fully fund monitoring – as well as to speed up reimbursements submitted by the state and the Navajo Nation.

### ***[1872 Mining Act Reform]***

Mistakes have been made. We must do everything in our power to ensure they are not made again.

There are as many as 500,000 abandoned mines – just like the Gold King – threatening waterways throughout the Rocky Mountains.

I believe in the principle that the polluter should pay. But the law of the land dates back to 1872, and it's one of the laxest public oversight laws in the country. It allows companies to take gold, silver, copper, uranium and other minerals from public land – without paying any royalties.

Hardrock mining companies have enjoyed this sweetheart deal for nearly 150 years leaving we, the taxpayers, on the hook for tens of billions of dollars in cleanup costs.

I've introduced a bill that would charge a common-sense royalty to help pay for abandoned mine cleanup and prevent future disasters.

I believe this can be done, if we put our heads together and work with each other.

### ***[Appropriations]***

As you all know, the federal government has been under severe budgetary constraints for the past several years. Automatic spending cuts took a meat cleaver to our budgets at a time when our economy was still recovering.

Many tribal programs were exempt from the cuts, but not all.

Fortunately, Congress and the president reached an agreement two years ago. Congress has not returned to the normal appropriations process. But we are no longer operating under the sequester. And we're beginning to make up for lost ground.

On the Appropriations Committee, I have been proud to fight for schools, law enforcement, Indian health care and housing.

In this current Fiscal Year, 2016, we provided \$2.8 billion for the BIA – \$194 million more than the previous year.

We put a focus on Indian education, providing for school construction and repair, including the Navajo schools on the new school construction priority list.

We also increased funding for the Indian Health Service – \$167 million over the previous year. That included a \$10 million increase to address substance abuse and mental health needs among Native youth.

It also provided a 14 percent increase for maintenance and construction of new hospitals and clinics, including funds to begin design and construction of the Dilkon Alternative Rural Health Center.

I'm continuing to fight for more funding for tribal programs for Fiscal Year 2017.

The bill that the Senate Committee reported in June increases funding for tribal health care programs by another \$186 million. That includes more funding to expand mental health and suicide prevention services and alcohol and substance abuse programs.

The Senate bill also increases funding for education programs by \$22 million and provides a total of \$133 million for construction and maintenance at Native schools. I look forward to getting these increases signed into law in the fall.

### ***[Economic Development]***

We need to continue to have a conversation about how we can promote economic prosperity in Indian country. Not just through federal funding, but to stimulate economic development and ensure more Navajo people spend their money on the Navajo Nation.

I have been a strong champion for expanding broadband internet on tribal lands. No matter where you live, you should have access to reliable internet service. It is key to economic development.

I just introduced the Native American Business Incubators Program Act. Our bill will help Native American business owners cut through red tape, and get access to start-up funding.

Yesterday, I held a discussion in Gallup on another bill I've introduced – called the CREATE Act – to help arts businesses in Gallup and here on the Navajo Nation.

The arts are part of New Mexico's unique heritage and culture. One in 10 jobs in New Mexico is related to arts and culture. And in the Gallup area it's 2 in 10 jobs.

My bill will help artists grow businesses, create jobs and share their artwork with our communities.

***[Cultural Preservation – Bears Ears Monument]***

Let me end with a topic that I know is very important to many of you. Strengthening culture and identity.

Many of you came to this council by bike or on horseback. For some, that was a journey of hundreds of miles. It is difficult. But it's part of a great tradition that reinforces your purpose here – and the importance of the work you are doing for your people.

Traditions, language, land and sacred objects are fundamental. They help deepen the connections tribal members feel to their culture and their personal identity.

That's why I am pushing for measures to protect native language education.

The nation's new education law – the Every Student Succeeds Act – includes provisions I championed. It removes barriers that can prevent Tribal leaders from teaching Native languages.

And my Esther Martinez Act – to protect and restore Native American languages and strengthen Native language education – passed the Senate Indian Affairs Committee in May. I will keep working to pass it through Congress and get it signed into law by the president.

I am also your partner in working to protect against the unconscionable theft of cultural objects.

I'm working alongside Senator Heinrich on the STOP Act to increase the penalties for stealing and illegally trafficking Native American cultural objects.

I have also introduced a resolution in Congress. It condemns the theft of Native American cultural items. And it calls on the federal government to work with tribes and religious leaders to stop the theft of patrimony and return stolen items.

And I am working to ensure Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection are on top of this issue.

Finally, this tie to sacred land is why I am proud to announce my support for designating the Bears Ears National Monument.

It is the ancestral home of many southwestern Native American tribes. Navajo, Ute, Zuni, Hopi, and other Native American people depend on the land for traditional livelihoods and cultural practices.

But it is threatened by looting, vandalism, and energy development. We should not delay protection for this important cultural landscape any longer.

***[Conclusion]***

In conclusion, we do live in a time of great challenge, but great opportunity as well.

I am honored to represent the Navajo Nation. Thank you again for having me here today.