



# 24<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council

## Office of the Speaker

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### **Navajo Nation Council members meet with New Mexico governor and appointed staff to discuss Navajo priorities**



**PHOTO: 24<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council members met with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham at the New Mexico State Capital in Santa Fe, N.M. on Jan. 31, 2019**

**SANTA FE, N.M.** – Members of the 24<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council met with New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and New Mexico Indian Affairs Department Secretary Designee Lynn Trujillo on Thursday to address ongoing issues that were conveyed at a meeting held on Jan. 22. Some of the issues discussed included the appointment of a deputy secretary for the N.M. Indian Affairs Department, elder care and services, impact aid, and education.

24<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) thanked Gov. Lujan Grisham for meeting with the Council members and provided her with a list of the immediate priorities.

“We really wanted to have a good dialogue and discussion, as indicated in the last meeting. This is one of many meetings we will have in changing the relationship between the state of New Mexico and the sovereign Navajo Nation. We have looked forward to this discussion with you and Secretary Trujillo, and this Council is looking to work with you to have a fruitful discussion,” said Speaker Damon.

Speaker Damon inquired as to when the governor would be appointing a deputy secretary to the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department, and said some of his colleagues would provide Gov. Lujan Grisham recommendations for the position.

Gov. Lujan Grisham said she and her team are currently vetting several applicants and would keep in contact with the Navajo Nation as soon as a decision is made, and she stressed that the deputy secretary would be need to be an individual that can improve strategies that work for all New Mexico tribes and promotes their sovereignty and self-determination.

Council Delegate Mark Freeland (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahí, Whiterock) expressed his appreciation to Gov. Lujan Grisham for meeting with Council members, but expressed a concern regarding the New Mexico Aging and Long-Term Services Department.

“We are trying to refine the processes on our side in terms of the Navajo Nation. The previous administration for New Mexico created the elder affairs department and was under a cabinet secretary office. Is it going to remain there at an elevated status? Services to our Navajo elders is very important and we encourage the state to continue to support the cabinet position,” said Delegate Mark Freeland.

He added that it had positively impacted 38 senior centers operated within the New Mexico Navajo area, and urged the governor to also create a department that specifically addresses Native American elderly care and services that can work directly with the tribes.

Gov. Lujan Grisham stressed that the goals of her office and cabinet secretaries is to foster a positive working relationship with the Navajo Nation through best practices, accountability, and increasing transparency so that processes are not punitive or unfair to New Mexico tribes in order to promote access to resources provided by the state.

In addition to the meeting with Gov. Lujan Grisham, Council members met with the New Mexico Public Education Department’s deputy secretary of Identity Equity and Transformation, Kara Bobroff, on Friday regarding impact aid and resources for teachers and schools.

Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) stated that the decision from the *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* case ruled that the distribution of the federal impact aid funding was unequal and did not benefit Navajo schools, and she raised concerns regarding how the resources would be utilized.

“I am concerned about how the funding would be distributed. We were told about offices that may be created and my concern is how is that money funneling down to the teachers and students who need it? How can we make sure they are really receiving that funding as opposed to just distributing resources to school administrations? I only saw that they are focusing on the administrations and I feel we need to make sure we support our teachers and students to the fullest,” said Delegate Charles-Newton.



**PHOTO: Navajo Nation Council members met with Kara Bobroff, N.M. Public Education Department’s deputy secretary of Identity Equity and Transformation on Feb. 1, 2019 in Santa Fe, N.M.**

Delegate Charles-Newton added that another important issue that the education department needs to address is its use of standardized testing in which studies have illustrated that minority students are unprepared due to the lack of resources. She stated that the department should focus on developing avenues to encourage individual achievement of all students.

In regards to educational programs, Council Delegate Pernel Halona (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’a’a’) advocated that in addition to improving college readiness, schools should provide information and training on vocational programs after high school, saying that students need to know they have an assortment of options after graduation.

In response, Deputy Secretary Bobroff stated that her initial responsibility at the education department is to address the Yazzie/Martinez court decision so it can benefit Native American students in tribal land areas.

“The Yazzie/Martinez ruling is something I was specifically assigned to for the lead on addressing the needs of the students and being culturally responsive. That’s the majority of the work that I will be doing,” said Deputy Secretary Bobroff. “The first few years will be on issues that students are facing, such as improving Native American teaching and administrative leadership to support indigenous languages and higher education readiness.”

Speaker Damon said that the Navajo Nation will continue to keep strong communication with the state of New Mexico and additional meetings are needed to push critical projects forward and to encourage dialogue between the Nation and the state to develop a stronger working relationship.

Also in attendance at the meetings were Council Delegates Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Jamie Henio, Vince James, Rickie Nez, Raymond Smith, Jr., Wilson C. Stewart, Jr., and Daniel Tso.

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