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Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., seeks funding restoration before the House Appropriations Subcommittee

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Although the American and Navajo Nation presidents share similar priorities in education, health care and public safety, the federal obligation to fund these needs for Navajos would be abandoned if the Bush Administration's proposed 2007 federal budget is approved.



This was the message presented by Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies here March 30.

Speaking to Committee Chairman Charles Taylor, R-N.C., and ranking member Congressman Norman Dicks, D-Wash, President Shirley repeated his request to have Congress to replace critical funding deleted by President Bush's proposed 2007 budget request, and recognize that the government is playing politics with the lives and futures of America's neediest citizens.

"The Bureau of Indian Affairs has failed to recognize President Bush's initiative by opting to allow minimal

Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies on March 30. He asked the subcommittee to restore needed funding that is proposed to be cut cut by the Bush Administration. U.S. Sen. John McCain has referred to the federal government's ploy as the "old game" of proposing cuts the Administration knows will be restored by Congress.

Michael Wero Photo

funding increases for BIA-funded schools," President Shirley said. "By not proposing increases, coupled with increased fuel and energy costs, the Navajo Nation will incur a great strain on the already under-funded student transportation and facilities operation programs."

Navajos receive a substantial amount of federal funding under the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies spending bill. Most notably, this includes education operations and construction, law enforcement and detention facilities, tribal court operations, natural resources management, road construction and some housing and tribal government development funding.

Some 98,000 Navajo students attend public schools and more than 16,000 attend BIA-funded schools. Consequently, among all Native nations, the Navajo Nation has a critical interest in the federal budget as it relates to Native education funding within the Interior's spending bill.

This year, however, President Bush proposed no increases in either the flow-through funds from the Department of Education, the basic funding of the BIA's Office of Indian Education Programs, nor Navajo scholarships. In addition, he called for the elimination of all Johnson O'Malley funds throughout the country.

“Instead of forward progress in educational achievement, President Bush’s proposal moves us backward.”

– Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr.



U.S. Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass, met with Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., when the President was in Washington to testify before the Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies March 30. Sen. Kerry said he would visit the Navajo Nation this fall. Michael Wero Photo

“Instead of forward progress in educational achievement, the President’s proposal moves us backward,” President Shirley told the committee.

On health care issues, President Shirley requested that the priorities jointly approved by the Navajo Nation and Indian Health Service be reconsidered rather than ignored, as is the case under the proposed federal budget.

Construction of new clinics and sanitation facilities were selected as the top two funding priorities for FY 2007. However, these priorities were not reflected in the President’s FY 2007 funding proposal, which, instead, decreases construction funding.

The Navajo Nation is concerned that the proposed replacement of the Kayenta Health Center, which received a designated ranking on the national IHS priority list, will be adversely affected by construction budget cut, President Shirley said.

In FY 2006, the Kayenta project received \$3.8 million in federal funding for architectural and engineering design. If President Bush’s FY 2007 budget cuts are enacted,

Kayenta’s first phase construction funding will be delayed. This, in turn, will impede improved health care to the Navajo Nation, President Shirley said. He asked that the subcommittee restore the \$20.1 million for health care facilities construction.

President Bush’s proposed budget would also completely cut funding for the Urban Indian Health Program. Last week, Senate Indian Affairs Committee Chairman John McCain, R- Ariz., called the proposed cuts the "old game" for the Administration; cutting funding it knows Congress will restore.

President Shirley gave President Bush credit for a proposed 4.3 percent increase for Indian Country law enforcement in the BIA Budget. But he said the proposed budget fails to address the desperate need for detention facilities on the Navajo Nation where 34.2 percent of the on-reservation Indian population in the United States resides.

Elevating Navajo law enforcement capabilities enough to make a difference, the Navajo Nation advocates annual 8-to-10 percent increases in the law enforcement budget for the years FY 2007 through FY 2010.

This target was reached in FY 2006, President Shirley said, but not in President Bush's proposed budget for FY 2007.

Regarding judicial responsibilities on the Navajo Nation, President Shirley told the subcommittee that the authority to establish Navajo Tribal Courts is recognized by the Navajo Treaty of 1868. However, the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch struggles to provide the services it is mandated to provide.

The Navajo Nation Supreme Court and its administrative services are housed in dilapidated trailer houses where access by the public is extremely limited, he said.

"All citizens should have dignified and respectable courts that promote trust and confidence in the judicial system," President Shirley said.

The President asked the subcommittee for \$13.3 million to fund a replacement for the Navajo Supreme Court building and to increase the Tribal Priority Allocation for Navajo Nation Courts to \$1 million.

Regarding social services, one of the most important functions of the Navajo and Native governments, the Bush Administration proposes a nationwide \$11 million cut to welfare assistance programs which President Shirley urged the subcommittee to restore.

The Navajo Nation estimates that 1,243 individuals – or fully 15 percent of the of 8,283 individuals now receiving these services – will go unserved if this funding is cut in FY 2007, the President said.

"These individuals will have no other programs to turn to since welfare assistance is a 'payer of last resort.'" he said. "Navajos struggle with the negative impacts of poverty because of unemployment and other social problems affecting their livelihoods."

The cut would result in a \$3.3 million decrease for the Navajo Nation which already experienced a \$2.9 million shortfall last December when the Bureau of Indian affairs budget for welfare assistance was depleted. The total need for Navajo was \$31.9 million.

The Navajo Nation's Welfare Assistance services include:

1. Child Welfare Assistance, which serves an average of 992 children and adolescents per month. This includes emergency shelter care, foster care and residential rehabilitative services.
2. Adult Care Services, which served an average of 1,053 adults and elderly persons per month. This includes in-home care, group home care, nursing home care, and/or other residential habilitation & room and board.
3. General Assistance served an average of 3,055 households, or 6,238 individuals, per month to meet basic needs that include food, shelter and clothing.
4. Tribal Work Experience Program serviced an average of 68 household members per month who participated in community projects eventually leading to employment, and
5. Miscellaneous Assistance was provided to an average of 100 decedents/persons for burial and/or emergency assistance per month.

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