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EDUCATION COMMITTEE TO LOBBY ON BEHALF OF NAVAJO NATION

The Education Committee is preparing to travel to Washington D.C. for several days of intense lobbying to Congress to increase funding levels for Navajo education that were cut with President George W. Bush's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2007. The Committee scheduled numerous meetings with members of Congress and their staff February 12-15, 2006.

The Committee is concerned that the budget eliminates funding for the long-standing and popular Johnson O'Malley program. The Committee is also disappointed that the Bureau of Indian Affairs did not request funding increases for BIA school operations. Instead, the Committee said that the Navajo Nation is requesting a 5 percent increase for elementary and secondary BIA education programs.

Another concern expressed by the Committee is the nearly \$50 million decrease requested for BIA school construction.

"This is a tremendous cut. We have many schools on the list that need money for construction," Committee Chairperson Leonard Chee said. The Committee noted that the federal government had been committed to school construction in recent years, yet the requested decrease seemed to signal a pulling away from that commitment.

The Committee also remains concerned about the lack of requested funding for Tribal Education Department development. Such departments should be playing a critical role in the education process for many tribes, but instead are often hampered because of a lack of resources.

Besides the concerns with inadequate resources for Navajo education, the Education Committee will also express its opposition to an extensive and expensive reorganization effort on the part of the BIA.

The Education Committee recommends that the BIA support initiatives in tribal self-determination, active involvement by the tribal departments of education in BIA educational programs, and full funding at authorized levels for Tribal Education Department development.

Leonard Chee, chairperson, said that the committee members will relay the message that the Navajo Nation is currently working on establishing its own definition for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as part of the No Child Left Behind Act. The act will need to be reauthorized in 2007, and the Committee is ensuring that the Navajo Nation's recommendations for revisions and amendments are heard at the Congressional level.

The Committee heard a report from Dr. Calvin White from the Division of Diné Education, on the preliminary research proposal to develop the Navajo Nation AYP with assistance from the University of Colorado's American Indian and Alaska Native program.

While some Education Committee members are lobbying in Washington, D.C., members Katherine Benally and Andy Ayze are scheduled to talk with Arizona state legislators about enacting an Indian Education Act - Arizona State, House Bill 2768 - similar to the one that is being used in New Mexico.

The activities of the Education Committee are geared toward implementing the provisions of the Diné Sovereignty in Education Act, which was passed by the Navajo Nation Council during its 2005 summer session.

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