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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: Thursday, March 9, 2006

Additional Public Safety Funds Distributed to Navajo *Funds Reflect Results of Extensive Efforts by the Navajo Nation Council Public Safety Committee*

The Bureau of Indian Affairs has announced that it will be providing the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety with an additional \$670,348 to cover personnel costs. The purpose of the award is to increase law enforcement and is to be used for staffing needs to combat abuse of methamphetamine and other illegal drugs, violent crimes and for other high priority needs on the Navajo Nation.

The funds now being allocated to the Navajo Nation are coming from an increase in the BIA law enforcement budget that was achieved in part by a major effort of the Navajo Nation Council Public Safety Committee over the last several years to raise awareness levels in Washington on the public safety crisis on the Navajo Nation. The results of this effort were clearly reflected in the FY 2006 Interior appropriations bill. That legislation, which provided for an increase of about half of one percent in overall funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, far below the inflation rate, provided for a 10.89 percent increase for Indian Country public safety, substantially above the inflation rate.

“We have been in a full court press in Washington for several years now seeking additional funding for manpower and detention facilities,” noted Navajo Nation Council Public Safety Committee Chairperson MacDonald-LoneTree. “It is gratifying to see this effort pay off in a tangible way for the Navajo Nation.”

“Unfortunately, as much as we appreciate these additional funds, the Navajo Nation still receives far less than its fair share of BIA public safety dollars,” said Chairperson MacDonald-LoneTree. Currently, the Navajo Nation receives only 12 percent of BIA public safety dollars, although according to the 2000 census one-third of the on-reservation Indian population in the United States lives on the Navajo Nation.

“Until this inequity is corrected, it will be difficult for the Navajo Nation to adequately address the public safety situation on the reservation, which in recent years has gone from bad to worse, principally because of an explosion in meth-amphetamine use,” added Chairperson MacDonald-LoneTree.

The Navajo Nation Public Safety Division is responsible for an area the size of West Virginia, with a resident population of approximately 200,000 and with tourism, a transient population of hundreds of thousands of non-Indians every year. The Navajo Nation polices this area with a small force of officers. In addition to responding to community incidents, the Navajo police force also provides protection to major dams and power plants, as well as hundreds of miles of interstate highways, high voltage transmission lines and gas pipelines.

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