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**NAVAJO NATION DELEGATION HEADS TO WASHINGTON D.C.
Motorcycle run honors Native American warriors**

A delegation left Monday, May 22, on the national Ride For Freedom XIX to Washington D.C., continuing the Navajo Nation's tribute to fallen Native American warriors, which began last week with the 4th Annual Navajo/Hopi Honor Run.

This is the second year that a delegation was sent with the purpose of honoring Native American warriors and advocating for Navajo veterans' issues. This year, the delegation is also extending the message that Indian tribes and nations should unite to honor Native American warriors with a nation-wide honor run.

This year, the delegation includes Ray Barney, Victor Dee, Leonard Gorman, Council delegates Curran Hannon (St. Michaels/Oak Springs), Ray Berchman (St. Michaels/Oak Springs), LoRenzo Bates (Upper Fruitland), Tom M. White Jr. (Fort Defiance), Omer Begay Jr. (Coprnflds/Greasewood Springs/Klagetoh/Wide Ruins), and Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale). This is the second year that Dee, Hannon, Bates and Begay are riding.

Along the way, the Navajo Nation delegation has been welcomed by the Cheyenne Arapaho Tribe, the Sac and Fox Nation and the Lumbee Tribe, as well as by the 82nd Airborne Division.

The journey began Monday at 5 a.m. from the Navajo Nation Veterans Memorial Park in Window Rock, Arizona with a protection ceremony for the riders conducted by Council delegate Rex Lee Jim (Rock Point). The delegation left at 7 a.m. to begin the ride across the country with the theme "Honoring Our Fallen Heroes."

On the second day of the run, the riders visited the Cheyenne Arapaho Tribe in Oklahoma. Angela Barney-Nez, from the Office of the Speaker, said it was a very poignant time for the riders to arrive because their fallen warrior, Lance Cpl. Hatak Yuka Keyu M. Yearby, had just been laid to rest the day before.

Later in the day, the riders were greeted by members of the Sac and Fox Nation and escorted from Interstate 40 to the Sac and Fox grounds where a ceremony in their honor was held. Honor songs that are rarely heard were sung for the riders and a cedar blessing was performed for them.

On Thursday, the delegation was met by six bike riders from the Lumbee Tribe and escorted to the tribe's reservation for a ceremony conducted in their honor. The delegation was blessed by the tribe's medicine people and welcomed by Lumbee Tribal President Billy Goins. The riders were also presented with Lumbee Tribal Warrior pins.

Later the same day, the delegation joined Council delegate Leslie Dele (Tonalea) to present a Navajo Nation Medal of Valor to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Dele, who served with the 82nd, participated in the division review before the riders arrived.

Speaker Morgan presented the medal to the 82nd Airborne Division on behalf of the Navajo Nation Council during a brief ceremony at the division's museum. The medal will be displayed at the museum alongside famous war memorabilia. It honors those Navajos who served with the division in all wars.

The delegation is scheduled to meet with the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs on Friday and will participate in Ride for Freedom activities through the weekend. On Sunday, the delegation will join hundreds of thousands motorcycle riders in a procession to the nation's Capitol.

The delegation also intends to spend the weekend advocating for veterans' issues with advocacy documents adopted by the Council's Human Services Committee and a petition regarding labels of Missing In Action and Prisoner Of War that has been carried by the delegation on its cross-country trip.

The advocacy documents call for a more holistic approach in addressing Navajo veterans' needs.

"We need to make sure that the federal Veterans Administration knows when it comes to our veterans, one size does not fit all. We require a different model for effective administration of services for our veterans," Speaker Morgan said.

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