Indian Country to get $2 billion for Public Safety and Water Projects

Years of ongoing testimonials by tribal leaders finally pay-off

WASHINGTON — For years, officials with the Navajo Nation have pleaded with officials in Washington, D.C. to increase funding for public safety in Indian Country. Those pleas were finally heard.

The public safety committee has spent the last several years meeting with members of Congress, the White House and Justice Department to ensure they recognize the great need for public safety improvements in Indian Country. They have provided consistent messages of the crisis in law enforcement.

“We consistently demonstrated a compelling case about our need for new facilities,” said MacDonald-Lonetree. MacDonald-Lonetree said the allocated money will help to stop the revolving door of violent offenders. The Navajo Nation has a population of more than 300,000 and is the same size as the state of West Virginia, yet there are only 59 jail beds across the Nation. Because of scarce facilities, it is common for inmates to serve only a portion of their sentence, or not at all.

“Criminals on the Navajo Nation have received a ‘get out of jail free’ card because of the lack of detention facilities,” said Delores Greyeyes, director of the Navajo Department of Corrections. “This is great news for the correctional officers, the police officers and all the people on the Navajo Nation.”

Tribal leaders said they will work to ensure the final conference report includes vital funding for the construction of detention facilities.

Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), Hope MacDonald-Lonetree (Coalmine Canyon/Toh Nanees Dizi), and Rex Lee Jim (Rock Point) were key individuals in getting $2 billion for public safety improvement in Indian Country.
New Mexico State Legislature awards $4.2 million towards 52 projects on Navajo Nation

May 3, 2008

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The New Mexico State Legislature awarded $4.2 million towards capital improvement projects on the New Mexico portion of the Navajo Nation.
The appropriations are set aside specifically for planning, designing and construction of facilities. The Transportation and Community Development Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council accepted the grant at an awards ceremony held at the Navajo Nation Museum.

Sampson Begay (Jeddito/Steamboat/Low Mountain), chairman of the TCDC, took the opportunity to address chapter house leaders in attendance. Begay applauded chapter leaders for seeking funding from the state on behalf of the communities, but urged them to seek funding from other sources as well.

“There is never enough funding appropriated to complete the entire project with the funding awarded by the State Legislature,” Begay said. “It is up to you to find innovative ways to make up the difference.”

Rebecca Martinez, capital outlay manager for the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department, said capital outlay projects have decreased across the state for capital outlay projects, including 2008 funding for the Navajo Nation. Martinez urged chapters to expedite the necessary paperwork to get projects rolling. “Some chapters still have not initiated the required scopes of work for their projects, which could stall the project,” Martinez said. “Overall, the Navajo Nation and the Indian Affairs Department are managing more than $32 million of capital outlay projects, which include appropriations as far back as 2003 that have been reauthorized.”

Begay acknowledged Martinez and her staff for their assistance to chapters with budget development and technical assistance.

Navajo Council Delegate receives award for negotiating agreement between Sheriff and Tribal Police

Eases jurisdictional issues between law enforcement agencies

May 7, 2008

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Edmund Yazzie, council delegate for Thoreau, was presented with an award by the state of New Mexico for spearheading an agreement between McKinley County and the Navajo Nation to help combat alcohol-related accidents.

Yazzie helped to launch an initiative which allows tribal and state law enforcement officers to assist each other without worrying about jurisdiction. Michelle Brown-Yazzie, the New Mexico DWI Coordinator, said Yazzie has been a valuable partner to the state.

“He has been instrumental in educating state officials on important sovereignty issues and the government process of the Navajo Nation,” Brown-Yazzie said. Yazzie helped to facilitate the New Mexico DWI Task Force and provided public awareness of DWI to the state.

“We will continue to work with state and county governments to help bring about positive change,” said Yazzie. The joint efforts of the negotiation included a number of officials, such as Sheriff Frank Gonzalez of the McKinley County Sheriff’s Office, Donavon Brown of Navajo Department of Justice and Sampson Cowboy, director of the Navajo Division of Public Safety.

Commission to curb racism and discrimination against Navajos approved unanimously by Council

June 30, 2008

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — In an act to improve race relations and investigate civil rights infractions against Navajo people, the Council voted unanimously to approve legislation to establish the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission Plan of Operation.

The legislation was sponsored by the Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale). The Council discussed the need to protect Navajo people from discriminatory acts, especially for Navajo people who live in border towns such as Gallup, N.M., Flagstaff, Ariz., and Farmington, N.M.

“It really gets to the heart when non-Navajos and non-Natives really put us down in border towns,” said Jonathan Nez (Shonto). “I believe this commission will be the avenue and will give the Navajo people a way to address racism. It will also address racism which occurs inside the reservation boundaries.”

Leonard Anthony (Shiprock) said it is important the Navajo Nation exercise its authority and power to protect the human rights of its own people.

“It is important the Navajo Nation exercise its authority and power to protect the human rights of its own people”

— Leonard Anthony, Shiprock

In or near border towns to assess the state of affairs between the Navajo people and non-Natives. The commission will investigate written complaints involving discrimination of Navajo citizens and network with local, state, national and international groups to advocate for human rights.

The commission will consist of five commissioners which will be appointed by the Speaker of the Navajo Nation Council and confirmed by the Intergovernmental Relations Committee. The members will be a diverse group of professionals in the following fields: Education, Business, Law Enforcement, Social Services and one member to be an at-large Navajo Nation member.

The commission will operate under the legislative oversight of the IGR Committee of the Navajo Nation Council.
Navajo Nation Council helps to make gourd dancing event a success

Washington D.C. event draws large crowd at the National Museum of the American Indian

May 24, 2008

WASHINGTON — The sacrifice made by Native Americans who have served in the military might have been unknown to some non-Natives, but a Memorial Day Gourd Dance held at the National Museum of the American Indian helped to educate some people.

“I can’t believe how many people are here,” said Frank Chee Wileto, former Navajo vice-chairman and Navajo Code Talker. “We have people from all ethnic backgrounds in attendance.”

“I’m glad people took the time to learn more about the sacrifices our people have made and I hope they left with an understanding of how much we love this country and our people,” said Anthony, who also served as the master of ceremony.

Several Navajo veterans also visited the World War II Memorial at dawn and placed a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Sponsors of the event include the Office of the Speaker, the 21st Navajo Nation Council and the Black Creek Gourd Society of Fort Defiance, Ariz. The Intertribal Veterans Association was the host drum group.

Navajo Nation Council Delegates Orlanda Smith-Hodge, Larry Anderson, Raymond Maxx, Curran Hannon, Larry Noble and Edmund Yazzie were in attendance as well.

Larry Anderson (Fort Defiance) speaks about the sacrifice Native Americans have made in the history of the United States military.
CROW AGENCY, Mont. — Teamwork and political mobilization was the theme at the Council of Large Land Base Tribes quarterly meeting and the Council approved various resolutions in support of issues affecting tribes across the country.

Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan lent his support to Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly, who presented a resolution seeking the support of the Council to add Mount Taylor – one of the four sacred mountains to the Navajo people – to the New Mexico Registry of Cultural Properties permanent list.

Other resolutions were presented, including a resolution supporting tax incentives in Indian Country. Leaders said economic development in Indian Country requires tax incentives for tribal partners and tax incentives help alleviate barriers against development.

Another resolution sought the support of S.B. 100, a bill which will be presented to the 110th U.S. Congress to develop a program to acquire interests in land from eligible individuals within the Crow Reservation in the state of Montana.

The approved resolutions by the Council will increase advocacy for the issues and more importantly will help to strengthen support when leaders give congressional testimony. Leaders agreed a unified voice is much stronger when advocating issues at the national level in Washington, D.C., and especially crucial in election year.

“This is an opportunity that will give us the chance to put forth what we want as Indian tribes,” said Carl Venne, Crow Nation Chairman and chair of the council. “It’s been too long that Indian people have sat idle and allowed others to make decisions on our behalf. We need to have a seat at the table and we need to get out and vote.”

Venne said the upcoming presidential elections are important and tribes have the opportunity to help modernize the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior.

“As Native people, we need to stick together and fight. We need to be organized and we can initiate change if we all work together,” said Speaker Morgan, who serves as vice-chair of the council. “We will not take a back seat.”

Joe Garcia, president of the National Congress of American Indian, also emphasized the mobilization of the Indian vote for this year’s elections. He updated leaders on legislative initiatives under the new administration and provided updates on legislation, which directly impacts Indian Country. He encouraged tribal leaders to support the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, which was passed by the U.S. Senate with a vote of 83-10 and is still waiting to be heard by the House.

Several Navajo council delegates attended the meeting, including Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Many Farms/ Round Rock), Young Jeff Tom (Mariano Lake/Smith Lake), Amos F. Johnson (Forest Lake), Lee Jack Sr. (Whitecone/Indian Wells) and Orlanda Smith-Hodge (Cornfields/Greasewood Springs/Klagetoh/ Wide Ruins).

The Council of Large Land Base Tribes come together for a photo after passing several pieces of legislation initiatives.
Training emphasized on conduct of elected officials

April 29- May 1, 2008

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The laws surrounding ethics in government law are complex and ensuring officials and employees understand how these laws are carried out remain to be vital to sustaining the Navajo Nation.

A three-day conference educating tribal employees and members was held in Albuquerque with more than 30 chapters attending and more than 20 Navajo Nation government offices attending.

Ethics in government law, regulations and standards of conduct for elected officials, and information on how to file an ethics complaint were among the main topics discussed at the conference. Sessions were held to help answer complex questions ranging from standards of conduct for elected officials to Navajo ethics in government law.

Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale) and Francis Redhouse (Teecnospos), chairman of the Ethics & Rules Committee, were among a number of guest speakers who spoke on the importance of ethics and procedure within Navajo government.

Navajo Nation tribal officials and tribal workers attended the Standards of Conduct conference to become updated on regulations and ethics in Navajo government.

MacDonald-Lone Tree addresses the issue of methamphetamine and other threatening issues on the Navajo Nation

MacDonald-Lone Tree explained how devastating the proposed budget would be to the Navajo Nation. She focused on the epidemic of high suicide rates in the youth to make her point clearly understood.

“Why would these innocent young children lose hope in their own lives? We cannot ignore their cries for help and allow this to continue.”

— Hope MacDonald-Lone Tree, council delegate for the chapters Coalmine Canyon and Toh Nanees Dizi (Tuba City)

April 16, 2008

WASHINGTON — Navajo Council Delegate Hope MacDonald-Lone Tree was a keynote speaker at the Health and Human Services 10th Annual Tribal Consultation meeting, where she delivered an address on methamphetamine and other threatening issues on the Navajo Nation.

MacDonald-Lone Tree met with officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to discuss issues affecting the Navajo people. The release of President George W. Bush’s budget left leaders and officials in Indian Country dismayed and numerous congressional oversight hearings were held. It was determined the president’s budget does not adequately cover necessary programs.

MacDonald-Lone Tree concluded 90 percent of violent crimes on the Navajo Nation are alcohol-related. To combat these statistics, MacDonald-Lone Tree said more concentrated efforts towards the establishment of a residential treatment center are needed.

“The residential treatment centers will make a significant impact on the lives of individuals who are often sent thousands of miles away,” said MacDonald-Lone Tree. She also expressed the nation’s need for additional manpower for emergency medical services, equipment and vehicles.
Navajo Nation Council sponsors pow-wow at 62nd Annual Navajo Nation Fair

“‘We are always striving to improve and want to provide the best possible experience at the pow-wow.’”

—Ervin Keeswood Sr., council delegate for Tse Daa Kaan Chapter

Sept. 7, 2008

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. -- Nancy Ahboah, 67, was all smiles as she danced at the Navajo Nation Pow-wow, which began to wind down on Sunday evening. Her smile brightened when she heard her name called by the announcer for fifth place in the Women’s Golden Age category.

“This pow-wow has gotten better every year,” said Ahboah, who is from Salt River, Ariz. “There’s grass in the dancing arena and the parking has really improved.”

Ahboah was particularly thrilled with the food and treats pow-wow participants were given each morning of the four-day event.

“We got rations! How about that?!” said Ahboah. “We’ve basically doubled our pay-out since last year.”

The advertised pay-outs attracted over 1,000 people from all over the Navajo Nation, the United States and Canada. One of the primary sponsors was the 21st Navajo Nation Council.

Shayna Meguinis, 17, of Alberta, Canada made her first trip to the Navajo Nation this year to attend the pow-wow. She was invited by outgoing Navajo Nation pow-wow royalty.

“I came to show them support and represent the Tusituwa Nation,” Meguinis said. “Everyone made us feel welcome here and made sure we had everything to get cleaned up.”

Local pow-wow trail goers were equally impressed. Robert Tree Cody, 57, from Navajo, N.M., was happy to come back.

“They take care of the people there,” said Tree Cody, who placed second in the Men’s Golden Age championship category. “They accommodated everybody.”

There were also several positive comments on the improvements to the pow-wow grounds area.

“So many women participate this year,” said Windy Boy, who is from Rocky Boy, Mont. “In terms of fairness and equitability, it’s the best and because so, it attracts the best singers and dancers.”

He complimented the other activities going on at the fair from the 4H-show to the rodeo.

“There’s something here for every kind of discipline and it certainly gives credence to the word fair,” said Windy Boy.

“The songs were powerful and we were happy to see so many women participate this year,” said Anderson, who is also the council delegate for Fort Defiance. “I really took notice to that, since this year’s theme revolved around the strength of our Navajo women.”

He said the gourd dance and pow-wow was a major attraction for families with children. Jessica Johnson, 12, came up with her family from Chilene, Ariz. She has been on the pow-wow circuit since she was two-years-old and has been winning consistently ever since, taking third in this year’s Junior Girls Fancy Dance category and winning $100. Amber Keeswood, 8, from Tuba City, placed in the junior girls traditional and was excited when she heard she placed.

Leila Help-Tulley, legislative staff assistant with the Office of the Speaker, was thrilled to see so many young people participating.

“It’s wonderful to see our youth engaging in positive activities and seeing how thrilled they are when they are rewarded with money and encouraged by their peers and family members,” Help-Tulley said. “I’m always so excited to help with the pow-wow.”

Keeswood was happy to receive positive feedback from attendees and participants and hopes people will share their pow-wow experience with others when they go home, so the event will become larger each year.

“We want people leaving here with a good impression of the Navajo Nation and the Navajo people,” said Keeswood. ■
Low Mountain Chapter’s Community Based Land Use Plan is certified by TCDC

May 5, 2008

LOW MOUNTAIN, Ariz. — the Transportation & Community Development Committee (TCDC) of the 21st Navajo Nation Council certified the Low Mountain Chapter’s Community Based Land Use Plan.

The certification brings the total amount of approved Community Based Land Use Plans on the Navajo Nation to 66. Larry Noble (Jeddito/Steamboat/Low Mountain) sponsored the legislation and presented it to the TCDC, who voted unanimously to approve it.

Larry Noble said the process was lengthy and efforts for the certification began in 2000. Numerous public hearings were conducted since with the plan updated in December 2006 and finalized in January 2008.

The seven TCDC members in attendance explained the importance of the certification before voting and commended chapter officials for their persistence. Under the Local Governance Act (LGA), the certification essentially allows chapter members to determine how they want community land to be used.

Sampson Begay, Chairperson of the TCDC (Jeddito/Steamboat/Low Mountain), encouraged the chapter to become LGA certified. Currently, there are nine chapters who are certified under the LGA.

Larry Noble recognized the members of the Community Land Use Planning Committee, including Jerry A. James, Venora Kamuho, Sarah Attakai, Benedict Gonnie, and Michael Bahe. Peggy Sue Nez and Dorothy Denetclaw with the Chinle Local Governance Support Center staff were also recognized for providing technical assistance to the committee.

The community presented a plaque to the CLUPC, Larry Noble, Sampson Begay, and the Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale).