23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation branches stand in solidarity to end human trafficking

Photo: Participants in the Human Trafficking "Blue Campaign" Awareness Walk pictured at the Navajo Nation Council Chamber after completing the walk included Speaker Lorenzo Bates, Council Delegates Amber Kanazbah Crotty and Nathaniel Brown, Vice President Jonathan Nez, Judge Geraldine Benally, the Strengthening Family Programs, the Navajo Nation Missing Persons Update Group, and legislative staff, on Jan. 22, 2018 in Window Rock, Ariz.

WINDOW ROCK – On the opening day of the 2018 Winter Council Session, the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches came together to stand in solidarity against human trafficking on the Navajo Nation through an awareness walk and the signing of a proclamation officially declaring the month of January as the Navajo Nation Human Trafficking Awareness Month.

The walk began at the parking lot near Wells Fargo in Window Rock and concluded at the Navajo Nation Council Chamber. Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty

(Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'l'í), Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), Vice President Jonathan Nez, and Judge Geraldine Benally participated in the walk.

Through the efforts of the Naabik'íyáti' Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee and the Navajo Department of Family Services – Strengthening Families Programs, both entities initiated the awareness walk, and a project to address human trafficking on the Nation, bringing to light confirmed cases that have aided in the development of new data indicating that trafficking activity is occurring in some Navajo communities, border towns, and truck stops.

Delegate Brown, a member of the SAP Subcommittee and the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee, said human trafficking is a "silent" issue that many people might not notice, but its existence is present on the Navajo Nation.

"I would like people to know it's on our Nation, it's in our communities, and especially rural communities. Our Navajo children are being picked up through social media and trafficked at truck stops or other areas across the United States. In fact, over 51-percent of women and children who are victims of human trafficking are never reported," said Delegate Brown.

Delegate Brown added that he and his SAP Subcommittee colleagues have begun work on the Navajo Nation's first Human Trafficking White Paper, and have started collaborating with the DFS - Strengthening Families Programs, Office of the President and Vice President, University of Colorado-Boulder Indian Law Clinic, Casey Family Programs, and the Navajo Nation Missing Persons Update Group.

The Human Trafficking White Paper will be a researched-based document that will allow the Nation to begin understanding human trafficking from a comprehensive and analytical perspective. Upon completion of the White Paper, a strategic plan would be developed to begin addressing human trafficking policies, laws, and post-vention protocols on the Navajo Nation.

Delegate Crotty thanked the Navajo leaders who participated in the awareness walk and said ending human trafficking on the Navajo Nation is a three-branch effort.

"When we think about the communities within the great Navajo Nation, it's easy to talk about economic development, land issues, and jobs. However, when we start getting to the root of some of our community problems such as trauma, childhood trauma, violence—it takes a special strength and a special kind of leadership," said Delegate Crotty. "I want to thank President Russell Begaye, Vice President Jonathan Nez, and Speaker Bates for not only championing this cause, but also being here with us today to show we are combatting this modern day monster."

Speaker of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council, LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, T'iis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland), expressed gratitude to the SAP Subcommittee for initiating the human trafficking project and thanked leaders who participated in the awareness walk.

"I appreciate all of you coming out this brisk morning and taking this walk. I want to extend my sincere appreciation to chairwoman Delegate Crotty, it was through her subcommittee on behalf of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council, that we are bringing this awareness," said Speaker Bates. "Today is important, and we can't let it end today, it needs to continue to be moved forward."

Speaker Bates extended his appreciation to President Begaye, Vice President Nez, and Judge Benally for participating in the walk, and commended the signing of the proclamation declaring the month of January as the Navajo Nation's Human Trafficking Awareness Month.

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