



The Navajo Nation
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Navajo President Buu Nygren tells congressional subcommittee funding for Navajo, Indian Country needed to advance justice, equity

WASHINGTON – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren told Congress on Wednesday that Indian Country and the Navajo Nation remain critically underfunded, requiring changes to achieve tribal equity and socioeconomic justice.



Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren tells a congressional subcommittee on Wednesday that federal budget cuts have a devastating impact on Indian Country and chronically under-funded programs represent a failure of the federal government to uphold its trust obligation to tribes for equity and socioeconomic justice.

Testifying before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies here, the President addressed 10 topics that included healthcare, education, telecommunications, Navajo-Hopi relocation settlement obligations of the U.S., abandoned uranium mine cleanup and water rights.

He said Navajo public safety programs are millions of dollars below what is needed, its Indian Child Welfare

Act program operates with a \$3.4 million shortfall and limited personnel, and that broadband on Navajo needs more than \$1.2 billion to replace outdated and insufficient technology.

“The Bureau of Reclamation’s 2025 budget request includes a proposal to expand the Indian Water Rights Settlement Completion Fund,” he said. “This is to cover the costs of enacted water rights settlements and address the operation, maintenance and repair associated with several enacted Indian water rights settlements managed by the Bureau of Reclamation.”

Speaking to the subcommittee on American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Days, President Nygren said there is an urgent need for federal support to meet the needs of the Navajo people.

“I strongly urge the subcommittee to act on these recommendations in FY 2025, both to uphold the government’s trust and treaty obligations to the Navajo people and to remedy some of the grievous injustices the federal government itself created and perpetuated,” President Nygren said.

The President asked the subcommittee to exempt both the Indian Health Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs from automatic budget cuts called “sequestration.”

“Across the board, federal sequestration cuts have a devastating impact on Indian Country,” he said.

“Federal agencies like IHS and BIA have been fiscally stagnant for decades. Chronically underfunded programs that tribal members rely on for healthcare, public safety, education, social, natural resources and essential services represent of the federal government to uphold its trust obligation to tribes for equity and socioeconomical justice,” he said.

For comparison, he said the Navajo Nation receives fewer federal dollars per acre than other tribes. Money is needed for agricultural programming, community subsistence and commercial development.

“We need more federal funds, not fewer,” he said. “The prospect of sequestration threatens the small gains we have made over the years. This subcommittee should implement provisions that exempt vital funding resources for Indian Country from sequestration rather than further subjecting them to these harmful policies.”

He said “advance appropriations” for the IHS was a huge success. Advance appropriations during the tumultuous FY 2024 appropriations process gave IHS much-needed stability for operations and basic health care services, he said.

Meanwhile, the President supported the provision of \$2.9 billion to BIA’s Public Safety and Justice Account. He reported that the Navajo Nation is critically under-resourced in public safety, requiring \$26 million to achieve federally recommended standards.

“With only 218 officers and 35 criminal investigators to cover 27,000 square miles,” he said, “This results in a ratio of 0.85 officers per 1,000 residents. That’s far below the FBI’s recommended 3.4 to 3.5.”

He said this shortfall results in more than 200,000 annual service calls with dangerously long response times.

When perpetrators are apprehended, he said, the Nation has inadequate correctional facilities to place them, forcing the early release of offenders and increasing risks to Navajo communities.

The President asked the subcommittee to provide \$1.1 billion for BIA’s Housing Improvement Program, or HIP, that is consistent with the recommendations of the Tribal Interior Budget Council, a process that enables

tribes and federal officials to work together to develop annual budget requests for Indian programs.

He said HIP is a needed program to help the neediest tribal members who can’t meet U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development program income thresholds.

“Whether it supports emergency housing repairs, renovations, replacements or even down payment assistance, it helps those who need it most,” President Nygren said.

Among the most urgent issues with the rising price of uranium and renewed mining about to begin south of the Grand Canyon, the President renewed a request to the subcommittee to provide \$5 billion to allow the Nation to clean up the 523 abandoned uranium mine sites on Navajo land.

“These relics of the past cause environmental and health hazards,” he said. “This includes cancer risks and kidney damage. The Navajo Nation predicts it will need an extra \$4-to-\$5 billion to cover the costs of cleaning up, monitoring and maintaining the remaining 46 priority sites.”

Since 2008, he said, federal agency efforts have not yielded plans for long-term waste disposal off Navajo lands. The EPA has not fully assessed the impact of creating multiple disposal sites on Navajo Trust and Allotment Lands, he said.

In 2021, the EPA, alongside DOI, DOE and NRC, began discussions with the Navajo Nation to identify potential long-term disposal solutions but no off-site cleanup plans have been established. He said the DOE and NRC should also contribute to long-term waste management.

Additionally, the EPA has not requested funds to evaluate 239 lower-priority, unfunded abandoned uranium mines. A \$500 million allocation from the FY 2025 budget is recommended to start addressing these abandoned mines.

"By investing in the health, education, infrastructure and economic development of tribal communities, we can honor our nation-to-nation relationships and advance justice and equity for the Navajo people," he said.