



**The Navajo Nation**  
Yideeskáądi Nitsáhákees

**DR. BUU NYGREN** *PRESIDENT*  
**RICHELLE MONTOYA** *VICE PRESIDENT*

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## **Navajo President Buu Nygren announces he has curtailed VP's authority, reports physical threats against him, staff by recall effort committee**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – In a press conference today, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren announced he would terminate the authority over all projects and initiatives assigned to Navajo Nation Vice President Richelle Montoya, and addressed threats made against him and his staff by the “Recall Nygren” group.

Speaking to reporters in his office and online, and to the public on his Facebook page, the President detailed reasons for his decision to curtail the Vice President’s duties and the reasons for the termination of Debbie Nez Manuel, the former director of the Division of Human Resources and founder and chair of the “Recall President Nygren” committee.

“Obviously, I'm demanding accountability with everyone in this administration, and that includes the Vice President,” President Nygren said. “I continue to ask the Vice President to submit to me her daily schedules and submit progress reports. She has refused all of these requests. Instead, she has only given me travel requests, forms for events that have nothing to do with this administration's priorities.”

He said the Vice President’s travel requests do not address the work she was given or anything related to the Administration’s priorities. Instead, he said, they are to attend film festivals, fashion shows and sporting events.

“Although these are important events to our people, it cannot be the sole job of the Vice President to attend these events,” he said.

“The Vice President would rather use the people's money to fund trips that do not benefit the Nation and collect the salary for doing little to no work.



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Everyone in my administration is held accountable, including myself. The Vice President is no exception,” he said.

The President cited assignments given to the Vice President that he said were not completed. These include the Diné Action Plan to address social ills such as violence, domestic violence, substance abuse,

suicide and mental health, oversight of the Office of Miss Navajo Nation, chapter projects, a review of customer service practices within the tribal government, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives issues, and the Responsible Pet Initiative, among others.

“Accordingly, I reassigned those initiatives to others to ensure that these programs were not neglected,” he said. “She has refused to provide progress report since my memo to her on June 17, 2024. Today, I have informed the Vice President that I have reassigned all of her remaining projects and priorities to other staff members...I cannot allow them to be neglected any further.”

The President said that although he has committed to provide her more staff with the new comprehensive budget, “given that she has not made progress on any of her projects, I don't see the need to provide her with any new staff.”

Another deciding factor he said was the Vice President's decision to sign Debbie Nez-Manuel's recall petition.

That, he said, “was her announcement to the Navajo people of her formal break from this administration. It is her way of saying she no longer supports this administration. I welcome her resignation to make room for someone who wants to be a part of this administration and will work with me towards the betterment of the Navajo people.”

Addressing the current recall effort against him and recent online statements that constitute a physical threat against him and his staff, the President discussed reasons for the termination of Debbie Nez-Manuel.

“Violent rhetoric comes with serious consequences,” he said. “Last week, a disturbed person, enraged by Ms. Manuel's words, charged into our office in

response to Ms. Manuel's statements. My staff worked hard to calm her down. Ms. Manuel has no regard for the safety of our Navajo employees.”

He said Ms. Manuel was assigned with tasks she didn't complete and her staff threatened a walk-out because of her abrasive management style.

The Nation has hundreds of vacant positions, while at the same time our employment application process is burdensome,” he said. “We are turning young professionals away because they are ‘over-qualified.’ To address this, I signed Executive Order 01-2024. Ms. Manuel was tasked with implementing

the Executive Order, which was aimed at streamlining the hiring processes and working to make it easier for our Navajo people to apply for jobs with the Navajo Nation. She refused to work with her staff and to move these efforts forward, which only hindered the goals of the Administration.”

He said his office was receiving daily complaints of harassment.

“After much deliberation and thought, I made the difficult decision to terminate Ms. Manuel's political appointment on June 27, 2024,” the President said, adding that he had considered her a friend and a key part of his campaign.

The President reported that his office received written complaints from Nez-Manuel's employees totaling 26 pages that Ms. Manuel was abusing and mistreating employees.

“My office provided copies of these complaints to Ms. Manuel and to the Navajo Nation's Health Education and Human Services Committee,” he said. “I found the complaints against Ms. Manuel to be credible and disturbing. These employees alleged bullying, harassment, retaliation and intimidation. Her actions against our employees not only instilled



fear in them but also had a negative impact on their mental health and well-being.”

He said he was advised that the employees under her supervision threatened a walkout because of the hostile work environment she created.

“Based on all of these issues, I made the decision that the Navajo people would be better served with another person in that position,” President Nygren said.

President Nygren also addressed the involvement in the recall efforts of Greg Bigman, a candidate of the last presidential election and a vocal opponent of his who is circulating recall petitions at chapter houses.

He reported that Mr. Bigman has attempted to take over the *Naat’aanii* Development Corporation as its CEO.

NDC is a federally chartered corporation created in 2018 to boost economic opportunities for the Navajo Nation.

“In this position, Mr. Bigman has refused to explain what happened to the over \$2.5 million dollars that the Navajo Nation gave to NDC,” President Nygren said. “Community members and Navajo leadership have repeatedly asked, ‘What happened to the \$2.5 million dollars?’ When I started requesting information, Mr. Bigman started circulating chapter resolutions for my removal.”

The President said when Mr. Bigman’s effort stalled, he joined forces with Ms. Manuel to seek a recall.

The President countered statements by the recall committee that his administration is not responding to needs of the Navajo people.

He said in his Oct. 10 radio address he cited various accomplishments, all from fiscal year 2024. These

include the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority connecting more than 550 homes to electricity using ARPA funds, soon achieving having 1,799 more connected homes, and bringing electricity to 2,300 homes.

He said homes have received 320 cistern and water-line connections, and more than 100 bathrooms have been built with 272 more in progress.

He recently signed a \$31.7 million contract with BITCO, a Navajo-owned construction company, to build 95 homes for veterans, he said. Also, the Southwest Indian Foundation will construct 40 homes. Eight have been completed and 21 more homes are under construction, he said. Two veterans in Northern Agency have received the keys to their new homes built by a Navajo-owned construction company, he said.

“We have also approved a waterline for Kin Da Lichee, Rock Point, and Rough Rock, and broke ground on a \$20 million To’hajiilee waterline for 16,000 residents,” he said. “When completed, the To’hajiilee project is expected to be one of the most significant water projects in Navajo history.”

He reported he testified Sept. 25 before Congress on legislation regarding four historic water rights bills that total more than \$6 billion in infrastructure. These include the Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act, the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project Amendments and the Navajo Nation Rio San José Stream System Water Rights Settlement.

“With congressional support and President Biden’s approval, I hope to announce the passage of two historic water settlements which will ensure a steady supply of water to the Navajo people,” President Nygren said.

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