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Diné bizaad becomes official language of Navajo Nation

'We are identified by our Diné name, our clan, our language.'

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – *Diné bizaad*, is now the official language of the Navajo Nation.

"As *Diné*, we are the image of our ancestors, and we are created in connection with all creation.

Last week, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren signed long-awaited legislation to have the Navajo language used, taught and supported by appropriations.

"One of my priorities coming in as President has always been to make sure that we make Navajo cool again," he said. "It's exciting to see the work that's being done. And, so, I commend the Navajo Nation Council for doing that, and I really want to commend all of you for doing that."

The legislation to make Navajo the official language of the Navajo Nation was sponsored by Navajo Nation Council Delegate Shawna Claw.

It states, "Since time immemorial, our people survived by maintaining our value system given by the Holy People. The core of our value system is embedded in the language."



On Christmas Eve, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren signed legislation to make the Navajo language the official language of the Navajo Nation.

"Upon our creation we are identified by: Our *Diné* name, our clan, our language, our life way, our shadow, our footprints.

"Therefore, we are called the Holy Earth-Surface-People – *Diyin Nohookáád Diné*."

President Nygren said leaders of today need to ensure that the generation of Navajos not yet born have the chance to learn the language of their grandparents and great-grandparents.

“What kind of opportunities can they have to learn our beautiful Navajo language?” he asked. “Today is going to be a good day because we're going to sign that into law. Then it's the official language of the Navajo Nation.”

He said it is appropriate that *Diné bizaad* becomes official on Christmas eve.

He said he is grateful to all the teachers of the Navajo language who work hard across the Navajo Nation to teach this precious language to young ones.

“Signing this into law is really going to showcase to them that they're the ones that should be put at the forefront when they're really making things work,” he said. “Again, all the Navajo language teachers out there, thank you.”

He said he wants to see a program created to train lawyers and judges to speak the language so that they can serve on the bench. And he wants to partner with the *Diné* Language Teachers Association to spread Navajo.

Each day, he said he thinks about how the Nation could make a real dent in the use, perpetuation and preservation of the Navajo language. He said his office has a veterans liaison, an MMIW representative, and a disabilities liaison to help when needed.

“Then I thought to myself, why can't I have a Navajo language and cultural advisor?” he asked.

After a Google search, he discovered longtime Navajo language teacher and translator Peter Thomas had worked on children's books like the ones he reads daily to his children.

He called Salina Bookshelf in Flagstaff that specializes in a wide variety of Navajo language books to inquire about Mr. Thomas.

“I said, hey, do you have Peter Thomas' number? I'd like to give him a call,” the President said.

In November, Mr. Thomas was hired as an Executive Staff Assistant to implement strategies and approaches to make *Diné bizaad* “the heart of my administration.”

***“Therefore, we are called the Holy Earth-Surface-People
– Diyin Nohookáád Diné.”***

“When you come to the Office of the President, you will see signage about *Keshmish* in *Diné bizaad*,” President Nygren wrote to the Council. “These phrases are learned or reinforced in our office and taken home by the staff to share with their families this holiday season.”

The President said one of the first executive branch projects will be to have the Navajo Division of Transportation design stop signs in the Navajo language that read “*Attsé*.”

Next, the Division of Public Safety will have Navajo Police cars display the word for police, “*Silao*.”

“All across the Navajo Nation, I want to say thank you to the Navajo Nation Council for championing this legislation, and to the sponsors and everybody that's been involved and that voted to really make this happen,” the President said.

“I think that to really fulfill the intentions of the legislation, how do we put some dollars and resources behind it so that we can actually put a dent into teaching the language,” he said. “I think in order to do that, we're going to need some dollars and resources actually allocated with this legislation.”

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