



The Navajo Nation
Yideeskáadi Nitsáhákees

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Navajo President Buu Nygren submits State of Navajo Nation address, attends White House meeting to select new commissioner of ONHIR

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren submitted his written quarterly State of the Navajo Nation report to the Navajo Nation Council while meeting at the White House about the appointment of a new commissioner for the Office of Navajo Hopi Indian Relocation, known as ONHIR.

Attending the meeting with President Nygren today was Navajo Hopi Land Commission Chairman Otto Tso and Vice Chairman Casey Allen Johnson.

The President reported that this is the first time in 20 years that the Nation has been invited to participate in a meeting about an ONHIR commissioner selection.

"ONHIR Executive Director Christopher Bavasi has led ONHIR as director since 1985 when a three-member commission existed," President Nygren reported. "The time has come, and is long past, for a commissioner to be appointed."

ONHIR was created by the 1974 Navajo and Hopi Indian Land Settlement Act, known as the Relocation Act. It was to administer the relocation of then-12,000 Navajos from land partitioned to the Hopi Tribe, 100 Hopis from land partitioned to

the Navajo Nation, determination of their eligibility for relocation benefits, and the building of homes in new locations.

On Feb. 25, 1991, the U.S. Controller reported that the three-member Navajo-Hopi Relocation Commission, consisting of Chairman Hawley Atkinson, members Ralph Watkins and

Sandra Massetto, had been abolished and succeeded by the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation with a single commissioner.

"Today's meeting is pivotal in our history," President Nygren told the Council. "It is the first time in more than two decades that the White House and ONHIR have granted us a seat at the table to discuss the future of a controversial



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program that has impacted the lives of countless Navajo families.”

The President said that prior to the meeting, the Navajo Nation Washington Office conducted interviews with more than 130 families to document their hardships, assess their homes, and build a case to show how their lives are still being impacted by the Relocation Act.

“The White House now knows what we have known for years – our people need action and ONHIR needs a commissioner,” he said. “Our people need a commissioner who understands this issue and its history, who is fair, who will act impartially and who can bring justice to an unjust federal law 50 years after its enactment.

“I will do my best to see that the right person is appointed, and as soon as possible,” he said.

On Dec. 22, 2024, the 1974 the Relocation Act will turn 50 years old. In acknowledgment of the 50 years of suffering Navajo relocatees have endured, President Nygren asked Council to draft legislation to authorize \$50 million to provide services they were legally unable to receive.

“I support a request of \$50 million to assist them,” the President said. “Through meaningful consultation, I know we can find a way to structure \$50 million over a period of time to assist the relocatees.”

President Nygren began his quarterly report with a remembrance of Navajo Code Talker John Kinsel, Sr., 107, who died peacefully at home Saturday morning.

In his honor and memory, the President ordered flags across the Navajo Nation to be lowered to half-staff for one week, from sunrise Sunday, Oct. 20, until sunset Oct. 27.

“We remember Mr. Kinsel as one of the first 29 Navajo Code Talkers,” the President said. “In his honor and memory, like our other Code Talkers, he

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will not be forgotten. We shall forever be in his debt for his bravery and protection of the United States and the Navajo Nation he loved.”

Mr. Kinsel served with the 9th Marine Regiment and the 3rd Marine Division. His clans were *Kinlichii’nii* and born for *Tábqghá*. His maternal grandfather was *Naakaii Dine’é* and his paternal grandfather was *Bit’ahnii*. Mr. Kinsel was born in 1917 in Cove, Ariz., and moved with his family to Lukachukai at a young age.

On Saturday, Navajo Nation Veterans Administration Executive Director Bobbie Ann Baldwin acknowledged Mr. Kinsel’s courage and dedication to his Navajo culture.

“We honor the life of our brave Navajo Code Talker John Kinsel, Sr.,” she said. “His heroism, courage and love for our Diné way life is beyond measure. We salute you Corporal Kinsel. Semper Fi.”

Veterans Administration Interim Deputy Director Olin Kieyoomia said the Navajo Nation lost “a treasure, a hero, a man who shaped history by saving countless lives with our Navajo language and instilled pride within the Navajo Nation and the world.”

In today’s address, President Nygren addressed the break in his relationship with Vice President Richelle Montoya. Last week during a press conference, he said the Vice President’s signing of a recall petition against him was her announcement to the

Navajo people that she no longer supports the Administration or its goals.

“Because the Vice President no longer believes in this Administration, I have lost trust in her to be willing to advocate on behalf of the priorities that we campaigned on together,” he told the Council. “There is nothing in our Navajo Nation Code that prohibits my action of welcoming a resignation, and no laws were broken.”

He reported that the harmony in their relationship was damaged in April when she accused him on social media of sexually harassing her during a meeting the previous August.

“Prior to her April social media post, things had already become challenging,” he said. “I remained optimistic that we could work through those challenges. As I stated in my first press conference, I vigorously deny and refute her accusation. No one is more eager than I to see the result of the special investigation of the Vice President's statements.”

He said he did not alter the Vice President's statutory authority or duties. He said none of her rights were violated nor did he attempt to remove her as an official of the Navajo Nation.

“I have only reassigned the tasks and projects she was entrusted with,” he said. “That decision was based on accountability.”

President Nygren said he told the Navajo people he would make the hard decisions as President, substantiate each one, and that he is doing that with the Vice President.

“That is exactly what I am doing here in order to get as much done for the Navajo people in the time I have,” he reported to the Council. “I have said that I will hold everyone in my Administration and Executive Branch accountable, including myself and the Vice President, and that is what I've done and what I am doing here.”

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