



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

## 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **In President Nygren's absence, Vice President Montoya provides the State of the Navajo Nation Address**



Vice President Richelle Montoya provided the State of the Navajo Nation Address before the 2024 Fall Council Session.

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – On Monday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council convened for the 2024 Fall Council Session at the Council Chamber in Window Rock, Ariz., to begin receiving reports and considering legislations including the State of the Navajo Nation Address as mandated by Navajo law.

For the third time since being elected by the Navajo people, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren failed to appear before the Council to provide the State of the Navajo Nation Address.

Under the powers and authorities of the President outlined in the Navajo Nation Code, the President is required to report quarterly to the Council during each regular session.

President Nygren sent a letter notifying the Council of his previous commitment to attend a meeting on Monday, Oct. 21, at the White House in Washington, D.C., regarding the future of the Office of Navajo-Hopi Indian Relocation.

Navajo Nation Vice President Richelle Montoya was present in the Council Chamber on Monday and stepped in to provide the report.

Vice President Montoya discussed early childhood education and school safety, stressing the need for community and government collaboration.

Upon being briefed on a recent incident at Tuba City Boarding School where students reported inappropriate conduct by a teacher, Vice President Montoya called for the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) to act quickly to protect students.

Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Task Force Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty supported her call, emphasizing the Task Force's action in holding the BIE accountable to incidents that take place within their school system and facilities.

"Additionally, we need more child advocacy centers due to rising child sex abuse cases on the Navajo Nation," Chair Crotty said. "The MMDR Task Force continues to advocate for our children's rights in these matters."

Vice President Montoya highlighted the importance of early childhood education in rural areas to promote family well-being. Delegate Helena Nez Begay mentioned that many families rely on Navajo Head Start centers and pushed for the reopening of centers that have been closed.

"We need a resolution to push for the reopening of Head Start centers and the renovation of existing buildings to provide this critical support for Navajo families," Delegate Nez Begay said.

Regarding the Yazzie/Martinez ruling in New Mexico, Vice President Montoya noted the state's failure to provide equal education for low-income and Native American students and called for enhanced communication between the Navajo Nation and New Mexico lawmakers.

On Oct. 15, during a press conference held by Navajo Nation President Dr. Buu Nygren, the president announced his reassignment of the Vice President's specific projects and responsibilities, effectively terminating her travel and operational budget within the office.

Vice President Montoya said that she was never consulted and expressed frustration about the lack of access to the president, stating she hasn't received responses to her requests for meetings.

Despite these challenges, Vice President Montoya said she remains committed to working with the Office of the President and Vice President (OPVP).

"I continue to be respectful to the OPVP, those are the teachings and guidance I received from my father," said Vice President Montoya.

Resources and Development Committee Chair Brenda Jesus praised the vice president for her courage. "As females in this political arena, we are often challenged," Chair Jesus said. "I want to stand with you as a female political leader."

The Council unanimously voted to accept Vice President Montoya's report, with 17 votes in favor.

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