



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation Council commends U.S. Congress for including jail funding in stimulus package

Public Safety Committee lauds Arizona, New Mexico and Utah delegations for providing hope for improved public safety in Indian Country

WASHINGTON — The economic stimulus bill signed into law today by U.S. President Barack Obama includes important funding for public safety in Indian Country and members of the Public Safety Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council are thankful to the U.S. Congress and the Obama Administration.

The stimulus package passed by the U.S. Congress on Feb. 12 provides \$787 billion in federal funding and tax cuts for economic stimulus, including \$225 million for the Correctional Facilities on Tribal Lands grant program. This important program, which is managed by the Department of Justice, provides funding to help tribes construct and renovate correctional facilities on tribal lands used for the incarceration of offenders subject to tribal jurisdiction.



Members of the Public Safety Committee of the Navajo Nation Council met with key officials of Congress to lobby for the stimulus package approved by Congress on Feb. 12, 2009. Pictured left to right is Delores Greyeyes, Navajo Council delegates Raymond Joe, Hope MacDonald-Lone Tree, Sen. Bob Bennett (R-UT) and Rex Lee Jim. (Courtesy photo)

Navajo Council delegate Rex Lee Jim, chairman of the Public Safety Committee, stated, "The Public Safety Committee is very pleased that both the U.S. Congress and the Obama Administration have responded to our consistent message that tribal jails desperately need resources to protect our people from violent offenders. This very important development hopefully serves as a signal to Indian Country – and specifically the Navajo Nation – that this Congress and Administration recognize the public safety crisis we've endured for far too long and finally plan to honor the government's trust responsibilities."

"We are so grateful for the leadership of our elected officials – especially those members of Congress who represent the Navajo Nation," said Hope MacDonald Lone Tree, who is a Navajo Nation Council delegate representing the To Nanees Dizi and Coal Mine Chapters and who is also a member of the Public Safety Committee. "By including \$225 million for tribal jails, this Congress has given hope to Navajo families and police and detention officers who have been put at risk due to our inability to incarcerate violent offenders because of our overcrowded and insufficient jails. Our congressional representatives have gone to bat for our people and the thousands of victims who have yet to see justice."

The Navajo Nation, the largest Indian reservation in the country, is experiencing a crisis in law enforcement due to the lack of detention facilities. The Navajo Nation has a population of more than 300,000 spread over an area larger than

the state of West Virginia. Unfortunately, the Navajo Nation detention facilities have deteriorated so severely that prisoners can only be kept overnight in three of the six adult detention facilities. Since the Navajo Nation has only 59 jail beds for the entire Nation, many inmates serve only a portion of their sentences due to the lack of available detention facilities.

"Finally securing substantial funding for tribal prison construction is excellent news and a credit to the work that the Navajo Nation Council Public Safety Committee has undertaken to educate Congress and the Administration about the need for new detention and court facilities in Indian Country," MacDonald-Lone Tree said. "The Navajo Nation Public Safety has a long history of working to educate our elected representatives and federal agencies about the dire need for new and renovated jails and courts in Indian Country, and especially in the Navajo Nation."

"Through regular visits with members of Congress, The White House, the U.S. Department of Justice and Congressional Appropriations Staff, the Public Safety Committee has consistently demonstrated a compelling case about our need for new facilities," said Raymond Joe, vice chairman of the Public Safety Committee. "I want to thank all the law enforcement and corrections officers, as well as the other Public Safety Committee members for their tireless effort to make our case in Washington."

The Public Safety Committee held 19 meetings last week with key members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate to encourage the final conference committee to include jail funding in the final stimulus package. Members included: Rex Lee Jim, chairman of the Public Safety Committee; Raymond Joe, vice chairman of the committee and Hope MacDonald-Lone Tree.

"We were very pleased to have the opportunity to meet with our congressional representatives and key players on the stimulus conference committee. Our meetings this week were crucial in ensuring that the final stimulus package included substantial funding for tribal jails," MacDonald-Lone Tree said. "It is very satisfying to know we were heard, and that the Navajo Nation finally has real hope that we can build modern detention facilities that will allow our families, police officers, prosecutors and judges to see a realistic deterrent to crime. After a long struggle to secure funding, we can now turn our attention to building new jails to detain violent offenders that have walked free due to the lack of jails on the Navajo Nation."

The Public Safety Committee greatly appreciates the efforts of Sens. Jon Kyl (R-AZ), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Bob Bennett (R-UT), Tom Udall (D-NM), Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ) and Congressman Ben Lujan (D-NM).

"The congressional members have all recognized the tremendous problems experienced by the Navajo Nation due to the lack of jails. The U.S. Senators and Representatives that represent the Navajo Nation have recognized that the lack of jails has undermine public safety on the Navajo Nation and put our people at risk since we cannot detain violent offenders," MacDonald-Lone Tree added. "We look forward to our continued working relationship with our Congressional leaders as well as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Department of Justice officials to put shovels in the ground and begin building the much needed detention facilities on the Navajo Nation."

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