



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Naabik'iyátí' Committee urges Congress to reopen and maintain all services at Crownpoint Medical Center

WINDOW ROCK – Naabik'iyátí' Committee members this week unanimously approved a legislation sponsored by Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau), that urges U.S. Congressional members to take action to ensure that all essential services at the Crownpoint Medical Center, an Indian Health Services facility, are reopened immediately and maintained.

In June, Crownpoint residents were notified of the closure of the emergency room, in-patient services, and obstetrics care unit at the Crownpoint Medical Center due to lack of medical personnel through the posting of signs outside the facility that directed the public to seek services at other hospitals.

Since then, members of Council and Crownpoint Chapter officials have met with Navajo Area Indian Health Service director John Hubbard and other IHS officials to discuss the problems.

Although emergency services have since reopened, Crownpoint Chapter president Rita Capitan said many doctors, nurses, and local community members say the hospital's Chief Executive Officer Anslem Roanhorse, is failing to effectively manage the facility resulting in the loss of doctors and nurses who choose to leave and work at other hospitals.

"Nothing is getting better and we're losing more and more doctors and nurses," said Capitan, who described the medical center as a "sinking ship."

Delegate Yazzie said community members from surrounding communities continue to express concerns and worries despite reassurance from IHS officials that the situation is being addressed and improved.

"I received 7 calls yesterday from people as far out as Thoreau and the Crownpoint area and they say there's still a dilemma even though the ER is open," Delegate Yazzie said, while noting that the obstetrics care unit remains closed.

The facility is located approximately an hour from the next nearest emergency service facility and serves approximately 20,000 community members and treats approximately 5,500 patients in the emergency room on an annual basis, according to the legislation.

Delegate Yazzie and Capitan also disputed claims that the shortage of doctors and nurses is due to a lack of designated land for housing. Delegate Yazzie stated that his father has made it publicly known that he is willing to give up his grazing rights near the hospital to develop housing.

“Crownpoint had a lot of good doctors, but now they’ve gone on,” added Delegate Yazzie. “We need to hold our Congressional leaders responsible.”

Capitan also pointed out that the Crownpoint Chapter has passed several resolutions supporting the reassignment of Roanhorse in order to appoint a new CEO for the Crownpoint Medical Center.

“Maybe our congressional leaders need to make changes. Whoever is doing hiring is not doing a good job,” stated Capitan.

During the discussion on Monday, several delegates urged the federal government to uphold their trust responsibility to the Navajo Nation. This notion is also reflected in the legislation which states that the Navajo Nation insists that Congressional representatives meet with IHS officials and personnel to address how the closures will be averted in the future as this action has endangered the lives of many Navajo people.

Naabik’iyátí’ Committee voted 12-0 in support of the legislation. The Naabik’iyátí’ Committee serves as the final authority for the bill.

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