



# 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Council members testify in support of federal funding before the Tribal Interior Budget Council**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Members of the Navajo Nation Council on Friday testified at the annual Tribal Interior Budget Council meeting in support of federal funding through the Bureau of Indian Affairs for Fiscal Year 2017.

The Nation's five priorities include funding for natural resources, public safety and justice, education, human services, and contract support costs.

Speaking before Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs with the U.S. Department of the Interior Kevin Washburn, Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Naa'tsis'Áán, Oljato, Ts'ah Bii Kin) stressed the need for increased scholarship funding higher education for Navajo students.

"In order for our Nation to thrive, we must have an educated population. However, only 7% of our people have a college degree or higher," said Delegate Nez. "Navajo awards scholarships every year, but we can only help a small portion of those who apply. In order to award scholarships to all of our applicants for two semesters, we would need approximately \$68.8 million."

Delegate Nez was also joined by Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), BIA Navajo Regional Director Sharon Pinto and Legislative Branch Chief of Staff Arbin Mitchell, in presenting the Navajo Nation's priorities.

Delegate Shepherd acknowledged that although federal funding is limited each year, the Navajo Nation has used its funding effectively in each of the areas identified as priorities.

"We have proven that given adequate timely funding we can leverage these funds to successfully satisfy and exceed program objectives," added Delegate Shepherd. "In each of the identified priorities — Natural Resources, Public Safety and Justice, Education, and Human Services — we can show that we have turned small amounts of money into major successes."

Also in attendance were Council Delegates Mel R. Begay, Tom Chee, Seth Damon, Lee Jack, Sr., Walter Phelps, Otto Tso, Leonard Tsosie, Dwight Witherspoon, and Vice President Rex Lee Jim.

Delegate Shepherd said that it was important to convey to the federal government that the leadership of the Navajo Nation is united in support of funding increases for the Nation's priorities, and thanked his Council colleagues for their presence in the lobbying efforts.

President Barack Obama released his proposed FY 2016 budget last month, which includes an overall increase of 16% for the BIA and nine-percent for Indian Health Service when compared to the current FY 2015 levels.

The FY 2016 budget also includes a proposal to reclassify contract support costs as mandatory permanent funding beginning in FY 2017, which many tribes have requested for years.

Mitchell explained that the Navajo Nation lists natural resources management as a top priority due to the traditional and cultural beliefs of Navajo people that relate directly to the land. In addition, Mitchell said that land development requires compliance with the Navajo Nation's Environmental Protection Agency which is included under the natural resources priority.

"In any development there's always NNEPA requirements and any development on Indian lands requires us to follow those requirements," stated Mitchell.

To view for more information, please click the following link to view the Navajo Nation's presentation to the Tribal Interior Budget Council:

[http://www.navajonationcouncil.org/pressReleases/2015/Mar/NN\\_FY17\\_Budget\\_Justification\\_Presentation.pdf](http://www.navajonationcouncil.org/pressReleases/2015/Mar/NN_FY17_Budget_Justification_Presentation.pdf).

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