



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### Council promotes youth and veterans with federal housing officials

**WINDOW ROCK**—In a meeting with top officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on Friday, Navajo Nation Council members advocated for funding and policy changes that would benefit Navajo youth and veterans on the Navajo Nation.

HUD Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Lourdes M. Castro Ramirez who serves as the head of the Office of Public & Indian Housing, Deputy Assistant Secretary with the Office of Native American Program Rodger J. Boyd, and the Administrator with the Northern Plains Office of Native American Programs Randy Akers were on hand for the two-hour meeting with Council members.



**PHOTO:** U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Lourdes M. Castro Ramirez addresses the Navajo Nation Council on Sept. 11, 2015 in the Council Chamber in Window Rock, Ariz.

Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) who serves as the chair of the Council's Resources and Development Committee which oversees Navajo Housing Authority, touched on several issues including the need to better streamline Navajo EPA processes to expedite housing initiatives on the Former Bennett Freeze Area and to construct more youth centers throughout the Nation with assistance of HUD funding.

Prior to meeting with the Council, Asst. Sec. Ramirez attended the grand opening ceremony for the new multi-purpose youth center in the community of Fort Defiance which was constructed with the help of federal funding through HUD and NHA.

"We need more youth centers developed. We have 110 chapters and every community is in need of one," stated Delegate Shepherd.

Additionally, Delegate Shepherd explained to the officials that the RDC in June, directed NHA to amend its Indian Housing Plan to include and give housing priority to all honorably discharged Navajo veterans.

Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) drew attention to the increased number of suicides among Navajo youth, stating that the development of additional youth centers will help to develop positive lifestyles and help teens to be more goal-oriented.

“We can see the difference in those who participate in youth events and programs. They are goal-driven, but in smaller communities they often don’t have that access,” said Delegate Brown. “I know these facilities will help and I know they will bring hope to our youth.”

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) advocated for policy changes that would allow for housing developments for higher income individuals such as doctors and lawyers in order to help communities develop as a whole.

Referencing a constituent in the community of Pinon, Delegate Witherspoon said changes in policy are needed to prevent individuals from losing their homes if they gain employment that offers a higher salary.

“A person in Pinon did not want to take a job because they then wouldn’t qualify for housing. That kind of policy needs to change,” Delegate Witherspoon said.

Delegate Witherspoon and Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) also urged HUD to develop housing that is widespread as opposed to clustered housing units and to amend policies to allow more Navajo people to become home owners.

“We need housing that allows for gardens, livestock ownership, and hogans to allow for ceremonies that the people connected to the land,” added Delegate Witherspoon.

Delegate Tsosie also requested HUD’s support for a Congressional initiative that would amend certain land statutes such as the creation of “restricted fee lands,” which may allow businesses to develop on land held in fee status to develop equity, but remain under Navajo Nation jurisdiction.

Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) emphasized that Navajo Nation has the seventh largest housing authority in the entire country and yet does not receive nearly the amount of resources and attention from HUD as others.

“We have can’t operate under the same system as other housing entities under HUD,” stated Delegate Damon, noting the need for policy changes to address the unique needs and issues of the Navajo Nation as opposed to other tribes and urban areas.

At the conclusion of Friday’s meeting, Council members urged Asst. Sec. Ramirez and other HUD officials to deliver their recommendations and concerns to President Obama and to continue meeting with the Council on a continuous basis.

Asst. Sec. Ramirez said she shares the Council’s commitment to helping the youth and veterans through housing and community development and said she will continue meeting with the Council at a later date.

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