



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council members express support for initiative to help homeless Navajo people

CHURCH ROCK, N.M. – During a work session on Tuesday, members from the Law and Order Committee and the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report from the “The Red Nation,” an organization that advocates on behalf of marginalized and discriminated Native American people in the cities of Albuquerque and Gallup.

According to the report, in January 2015 the organization began working with community members to combat violence, discrimination, and exploitation of Native American people in the community of Gallup through an initiative known as “No Dead Natives.”

Nick Estes, cofounder of The Red Nation organization, said the group collaborates with the Immediate Action Group in Gallup to provide necessities to homeless individuals such as winter clothing and non-perishable food items.

“We formed to address as what we saw as border town violence, especially after the murders of Kee Thompson and Allison Gorman [in Albuquerque in July 2014]. We are looking at it as the widespread violence against Navajo people, and Native people in general,” said Estes.

The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission has worked with the organization to bring awareness of homelessness to the Navajo Nation. NNHRC commissioner Dr. Jennifer Denetdale provided information from her research regarding violence, discrimination, and homelessness of Navajo people in Gallup.

According to Dr. Denetdale’s report, Navajo people spend approximately 70-cents of every dollar when they patron businesses in Gallup, which amounts to over \$17 million in revenue on an annual basis.

“Gallup is not an alien place. Diné people and indigenous people are not aliens or intruders into a place like Gallup. This is our homeland and this is a part of traditional Navajo lands. We belong here in Gallup. Let us remember and always operate from that space—that we belong here and we are not intruders,” said Dr. Denetdale.

LOC member Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahí, Whiterock) said U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Lujan (D – New Mexico 3rd District) has inquired about the homeless issue in Gallup.

“I met with [Rep. Lujan’s] staff specifically on this issue and scheduled a follow up meeting with the Law and Order Committee, then meet with other standing committees, and eventually with the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee. He was very interested in a meeting with Council and with Gallup Mayor Jackie McKinney,” said Delegate Perry.

Delegate Perry commended the group and issued a directive to have The Red Nation and the Immediate Action Group present before the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee and the Navajo Nation Council to provide further information and to educate Council members regarding their initiative.

According to the report, the city of Gallup has 39 active liquor licenses that generate approximately \$35-40 million in liquor sales each year, with consumers mainly being Native American. The report also referenced that often pawnshops regularly participate in unfair payout and financing practices, and operate high-interest predatory lending schemes that specifically target Native Americans.

EHSC vice chair Council Delegate Norman M. Begay (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee) said there are existing state laws in place to protect homeless individuals and provide funding for detox and rehabilitation centers.

“We don’t push these laws. We need to educate the people, even at the chapter level, because no one educates our people. Look at all the valuables that our elders pawn just to go to the casino,” said Delegate Begay. “If we put our foot down and help create and enforce these laws, then the next time around they will be more afraid when they try to violate these laws again.”

Delegate Begay said it is important to reach out to other Native American communities to begin working together in helping their Native people, such as the Pueblo Nations that surround the Gallup and Albuquerque areas.

EHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) recommended to The Red Nation group to provide recommendations along with a legislative intent to begin the process of addressing the homeless issue in border towns.

“Legislations can be introduced. If your positions are there and your advocacy is there, then we can garner other resolutions from chapters and drop them. We are legislators, that is why we are here. You have to bring these issues to us this way. Have a legislative intent. That phrase right there should draw a picture of what path you want to go,” said Delegate Hale.

Delegate Hale expressed appreciation to The Red Nation organization for their presentation and said he and other Council members would be open to a follow up meeting with the group to begin developing solutions that will eventually enable the drafting of legislative policies at the tribal and state levels.

Estes thanked the two committees for listening to the report and expressed gratitude to the Office of the Speaker and Council for collaborating with their organization to begin finding solutions to decrease exposure deaths and homelessness in Gallup.

“[The Office of the Speaker staff] and Speaker LoRenzo Bates have been very supportive and we have been in communication. We want to thank you for everything that has been shared here. We came here with open hearts to actually listen. We want to work with Council, we want to do this with full intentions of collaboration,” said Estes.

The Red Nation is scheduled to provide a report on the “No Dead Natives” initiative to the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee on Jan. 21 at the Council Chamber in Window Rock.

For more information on participating in the “No Dead Natives” campaign, you may contact The Red Nation organization at contact@therednation.org or you can visit the website at www.therednation.org.

The public is encouraged to donate winter clothing and non-perishable food items, which can be dropped off at the Office of the Speaker or the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock.

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