



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Speaker Damon, 24th Navajo Nation Council
commend passage of New Mexico Senate Bill 99**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Speaker Seth Damon and members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council extended their commendation to the New Mexico Legislature Thursday following the passage of Senate Bill 99. The bill allows the granting of high school diplomas to veterans of the Vietnam War starting July 1, 2020.

“This is a significant moment for our many Navajo veterans that fought for democracy abroad. It is with great honor that the Navajo Nation extends its deepest regard to the State of New Mexico for allowing this gesture to be granted to our veterans of the Vietnam War. We join the state in praising veteran accomplishments in serving our communities, and our country, honorably,” said Speaker Seth Damon.

The bill was sponsored by New Mexico State Senator George K. Muñoz, whose district spans San Juan, McKinley, and Cibola Counties. “This is for our veterans who served honorably in defending our country,” said Sen. Muñoz. “This came from our district, where 3000 Navajo people will be eligible for this alone,” he said.

Sen. Munoz recognized the community of Coyote Canyon for raising this issue and advocating for Vietnam veterans at the state level.

Under the approved bill, Vietnam War veterans that were scheduled to graduate between Feb. 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975 will be eligible for a high school diploma by a local New Mexico school board. For many young men during this period,

the normal high school graduation timeline was affected by a period of conscription in which they were called to military service by lottery.

“Now, by having a high school diploma, Vietnam War veterans can go to institution of higher learning to utilize their hard-earned veteran educational benefits. We commend the New Mexico State Legislature for helping our veterans better access their Veterans Administration benefits,” said Chair Daniel Tso of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC). HEHSC oversees veteran-related issues and programs in the Navajo Nation.

SB99 was unanimously approved by the N.M. Senate on Feb. 15 by a vote of 39 in favor, 0 opposed. On Thursday, the last day of the N.M. State Legislature’s regular session, the N.M. House of Representatives voted unanimously to approve SB99 by a vote of 67 in favor, 0 opposed.

Previously, the 24th Navajo Nation Council voted to establish the Navajo Nation’s official position in support of SB99 on Jan. 23 at a meeting of the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee. From there, Office of the Speaker staff and key state partners utilized Resolution No. NABIJA-08-20 to advocate and lobby for SB99’s passage during this year’s legislative session.

Now that SB99 has passed both chambers of the New Mexico Legislature, the bill awaits N.M. Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s signature to become law.

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