



24th Navajo Nation Council

Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Census 2020 Complete Count Commission Starts Strategizing to Ensure Every Navajo Citizen is Counted



Members of the Navajo Nation Census 2020 met for the first time May 24, 2019, to start strategizing ways to ensure every Navajo citizen is counted with the U.S. Census next year.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members appointed to the Navajo Nation Census 2020 Complete Count Commission met for the first time May 24 the day after legislation finalizing its membership was approved by the 24th Navajo Nation Council Naabik'iyáti' Committee in Window Rock.

The commission consists of five council delegates representing the five agencies on the Nation and five appointees selected by President Jonathan Nez. The plan of operation directs the commission to hold quarterly meetings to ensure that every Navajo citizen living on the Navajo Nation is counted in the 2020 Census.

“One of our main concerns is the checkerboard area where the counts in one area could be toward Navajo, or they could be toward the state,” Arbin Mitchell, a tribal partnership specialist with the U.S. Census Bureau, told the committee. “The Navajo Nation government has lots of

authorities and enterprises to partner with and we need their help, especially the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service.”

Complete Count 2020 Census groups around the Navajo Nation are beginning to start strategizing effective ways to get accurate counts for the census in their areas. The states of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah have created commissions.

County governments on the Navajo Nation also have commissions in place. Mitchell identified Arizona’s Apache, Navajo, and Coconino counties and San Juan County, New Mexico, as having commissions in place that are working to identify ways to secure an accurate census count for their regions. McKinley County, New Mexico, and San Juan County, Utah, have not implemented commissions yet, Mitchell said.

The Navajo Complete Count Commission is scheduled to meet with New Mexico U.S. Sens. Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall, Navajo Vice President Myron Lizer, BIA Eastern Navajo Agency Superintendent Lester Tsosie, and regional U.S. Census representatives at the To’hajiilee Chapter House on May 29.

The group will hold a discussion on topics like household access and identification issues, the nuances of local hiring, lack of infrastructure, language and cultural barriers, faith in government, lack of connectivity, and poverty-related challenges. The meeting will include traveling to a local resident’s home to hear first-hand testimony on the challenges of counting individuals on the Navajo Nation.

During the commission discussion, Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Blue Gap/Tachee, Tselani/Cottonwood) told members that the Navajo Nation will need to develop a media plan to include newspapers and radio stations to reach out to Navajo citizens to spread the message of the census’s importance.

“The key objective is allocating money into a budget where we have funding sources from the Council, the states, and from the federal level,” stated Delegate Begay.

Commission members discussed the undercount that occurred in the 2010 census and methods to avoid an undercount again. Federal programs that rely on census data to distribute funding to the Nation were lower after 2010.

The Naabik’iyáti’ Committee legislation that passed the day earlier was still finalizing the official resolution process, so the 8 a.m. meeting did not constitute an official meeting of the commission. Instead it was designated as an informal discussion and no action items were considered. The group chose June 2 at 10 a.m. as its first official meeting.

Of the 10 members on the commission, the five Council Delegates appointed by Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) are:

- Edison Wauneka representing the Fort Defiance Agency (Oak Springs, St. Michaels)
- Thomas Walker Jr. (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi Tó’ii) representing the Western Agency,
- Jamie Henio (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee) representing the Eastern Agency,
- Kee Allen Begay Jr. representing the Chinle Agency, and

- Charlaine Tso (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teechnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) representing the Northern Agency.

The five presidential appointees on the commission are Kathleen Arviso from Vanderwagen, N.M., James Adakai from Oljato, Utah, Lena Fowler from Tuba City, Ariz., Jesse Thompson from Teesto-Hardrock, Ariz., and Myron Tsosie from Chinle, Ariz.

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