



Speaker Seth Damon signs Navajo Nation Diné Pride Week Proclamation to recognize equality progress

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 23, 2020



PHOTO: 24th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon (seated) signed the 2020 Navajo Nation Diné Pride Week Proclamation Jun. 22, 2020 in front of the Navajo Nation Council Chamber in Window Rock, Arizona. Joining him (standing, left to right) are Diné Pride Board of Directors Member Geronimo Louie, Diné Pride Co-founder and Director Alray Nelson, Council Delegate Carl R. Slater and Council Delegate Charlaïne Tso.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Speaker Seth Damon of the 24th Navajo Nation Council furthered equality advocacy efforts on Monday, Jun. 22 by signing a proclamation designating the week of Jun. 22-28, 2020 as Diné Pride Week. The proclamation establishes the first-ever action of its type by a Navajo Nation governmental entity and comes nearly 15 years after the Diné Marriage Act of 2005 became law.

The proclamation recognizes the ongoing efforts of equality proponents on the Navajo Nation, with a special focus on the mental well-being of young Navajo lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQIA) people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

“The Navajo Nation continues to take lead in Indian Country on several different issues,” said Alray Nelson, co-founder and executive director of the Diné Pride organization. “I believe, and the community believes, that the Navajo Nation needs to lead again in regards to the ideas of the future for the LGBTQ community.”

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Nelson provided words of encouragement for Navajo LGBTQIA people rooted in traditional and cultural ideas about orientation and identity. Since time immemorial, said Nelson, LGBTQIA people were recognized as sacred beings that occupied important places in Diné (Navajo) society.

Council Delegate Carl R. Slater (Round Rock, Tséché'izhí, Rock Point, Lukachugai, Tsaille-Wheatfields) recognized that supporting Navajo people during the time of COVID-19 pandemic is critical, especially for those identifying as LGBTQIA. The Navajo kinship system, or k'é, is a significant part of the Navajo way-of-life that relates all Navajo people to one another.

"We are seeing so much upheaval and unrest across the United States. What powers us and can power this movement to respect and clarify the rights of everyone in Navajo society is solidarity," said Delegate Slater. He emphasized the importance and value of diversity and the common struggles for equal rights currently taking place across the country.

"I give you my love and ask that you see hope through these turbulent times," said Delegate Slater. He added that legislative action may come this week regarding Navajo LGBTQIA rights.

Council Delegate Charlene Tso (Mexican Water, Tólikan, Teenospos, Aneth, Red Mesa) expressed hope that the Diné People will end the exclusion of Navajo LGBTQIA from exclusion and stigma. She remembered those that were lost to suicide from lack of acceptance, bullying and ridicule.

"This is a time where we can come together, as Diné, and accept and love and respect one another again," said Delegate Tso. She recognized the traditional and cultural teachings given to her by her grandmother, that all Navajo people deserve respect as holy beings.

"Moving forward, I really hope that our young individuals, LGBTQIA, know that there is a place here in Window Rock. You have people that will be your voice, that will be your protector, as well," she said.

Speaker Seth Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) recognized the efforts of past and present LGBTQIA members that worked towards equality on the Navajo Nation.

"Our lives here, and our time as leaders, are very limited. And in doing these things, we bring leadership to the role," said Speaker Damon. "To change policies and procedures, to change everybody's little bit of hope, that they have a better tomorrow."

In 2019, the pride flag was flown in front of the Navajo Nation Council Chamber for the first time in modern history. "We are looking out for our People, our family, our friends, our relatives and everyone who supports the LGBTQ community," said Speaker Damon.

As the late Hon. Annie Dodge Wauneka (Klagetoh, Wideruins), a devout advocate of the rights of every Navajo person, told Congress in the late 1960s, kinship and identity form the cornerstone of our responsibility to each other. Speaker Damon vowed to support equal rights efforts by Navajo legislators and organizations centered on the Diné Marriage Act of 2005 that explicitly prohibited same-sex marriage on the Navajo Nation.

Speaker Damon read aloud the Navajo Nation Diné Pride Week Proclamation in front of the Navajo Nation Council Chamber in Window Rock, Arizona and signed it alongside Delegates Slater and Tso. As a legislative proclamation, the accompanying legislation will be considered by the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee and the Navajo Nation Council.

For more information regarding the virtual Diné Pride Week events being facilitated through the Diné Pride organization, please visit <https://www.navajonationpride.com/> or visit the Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/NavajoNationPride/>.

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The Great Navajo Nation

Proclamation

Diné Pride Week

WHEREAS, the Navajo Nation recognizes that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirit people (LGBTQ+) are important to our livelihood and diversity since time immemorial;

WHEREAS, President William J. Clinton proclaimed June 2000 as Gay and Lesbian Pride Month and President Barack H. Obama proclaimed June 2016 as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month to acknowledge the importance of respect and fair treatment for all people;

WHEREAS, the Navajo Nation will continue to protect its citizens from discrimination based on age, race, disability, ethnicity, family or marital status, gender identity or expression, language, national origin, physical and mental ability, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status and other characteristics that make our citizens unique under the law;

WHEREAS, the Navajo Nation is committed to fostering, cultivating and preserving a culture of inclusion, fairness and equality;

WHEREAS, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirit people are *ni'hookáá' diyin dine'é bila' ashdla'ii*, who are five-fingered earth-surface holy people that are sacred;

WHEREAS, the Navajo Nation stands behind LGBTQ+ members and will continue to uplift all people, both young and long-lived, in their pursuit of basic civil and human rights;

WHEREAS, the Navajo Nation shall honor the diverse identities among the Navajo People, who are worthy of love, respect, and fairness under the law;

WHEREAS, the community-driven Diné Equality and Diné Pride organizations continue to promote the interests of all Indigenous LGBTQ+ peoples throughout the country;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, SETH DAMON, Speaker of the Great Navajo Nation, do hereby proclaim June 22-28, 2020 as **Diné Pride Week** throughout the Navajo Nation upon approval of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee and the 24th Navajo Nation Council.

Dated this 22nd day of June, 2020

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

SPEAKER