



Navajo Nation Council confirms Valinda Cook Shirley as new Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency executive director

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PHOTO: Newly-appointed Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency Executive Director Valinda Cook Shirley was confirmed by the Navajo Nation Council on Feb. 12 through Legislation No. 0010-21 sponsored by Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. Photo courtesy Office of the President and Vice President.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Navajo Nation Council voted unanimously on Friday to confirm the appointment of Valinda Cook Shirley to the executive directorship of the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency (NNEPA). Shirley will now lead the program in a permanent capacity following the Council's discussion and final action.

The bill was sponsored by Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) and was introduced on Jan. 20 following Shirley's acting appointment by the Nez-Lizer Administration effective Jan. 4.

The Navajo Nation Code requires the NNEPA executive director to be appointed by the Navajo Nation President, subject to confirmation by the Council. Prior to Council's confirmation, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) is responsible for considering the appointee.

RDC provided its recommendation of Shirley's appointment on Feb. 3 with a unanimous vote of five in favor. Shirley's presentation to the committee was conducted entirely in the Navajo language and featured her community-focused environmental consultation work.

Shirley has served since May 2019 as a senior remedial project manager with the Navajo Nation Superfund Program (NNSP) within the NNEPA's Waste Regulatory and Compliance Department.

Shirley also serves in the capacity of vice president of the Rock Point Community School Board, having been a member since January 2017.

Her past experience also includes work as a community involvement coordinator for the Phase 2 Removal Site Evaluation Trust project, an environmental specialist within the NNEPA, and other roles related to the environment and her local school board.

Once the legislation confirming Shirley's appointment was presented to the Council, delegates expressed appreciation for her fluency and further stressed the critical nature of the NNEPA's work.

Delegates discussed current and upcoming initiatives relating to ongoing efforts to remediate abandoned uranium mines across the Navajo Nation. The discussion also touched on the implementation of settlement funds from Tronox abandoned uranium mines, Shirley's position on deregulation under the Trump Administration, the overabundance of illegal trash sites and enforcement needs, and the next revision of the US EPA's Region 9 ten-year plan.

In her application, Shirley stated: "Since 1992, Navajo EPA has been the regulatory authority that safeguards *Diné bikéyah dóó Nihookaa' Dine'é*. In my experience working with the agency, it has served as an integral part of government by ensuring *Nihimá Nahasdzaan dóó Nihit'aa' Yádiithi'* are kept clean to the highest of standards for our seventh-generation grandchildren."

Shirley also said she has spearheaded the Northeast Church Rock Mine Site Abandoned Uranium Mine (AUM) site project in New Mexico in addition to the Tronox sites in Cove and Tse Tah. Her work also included advising the US EPA in Applicable or Relevant and Appropriate Requirements (ARARs) used in the clean-up standards at the Mariano Lake, Mac and Black Mine sites in New Mexico.

After discussing Shirley's experience and understanding of the NNEPA, the Council voted to unanimously confirm the appointment with a vote of 22 in favor and none opposed.

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