



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Indian Affairs Assistant Secretary Bryan Newland welcomed by Navajo Nation Leaders

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PHOTO: Speaker Seth Damon and members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council welcome Assistant Secretary Bryan Newland to the Council Chambers in Window Rock, Ariz.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Last week, Speaker Seth Damon and the 24th Navajo Nation Council hosted a roundtable meeting with Indian Affairs Assistant Secretary Bryan Newland from the United States Interior Department and Gregory Mehojah, Navajo Regional Director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at the Navajo Nation Council Chambers.

Assistant Secretary Newland visited New Mexico and Arizona over four days for meetings and listening sessions with tribal leaders from the Hopi Tribe, Gila River Indian Community, Ak-Chin Indian Community, Havasupai Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, the All Pueblo Council of Governors, and the Navajo Nation.

Immediate challenges related to climate change, infrastructure degradation, American Rescue Act Plan (ARPA) project funding, and the ongoing water crisis in the southwest were topics highlighted.

“By signing the bipartisan infrastructure bill into law, President Biden sent a clear message to Sovereign Nations around the country that we are a top priority. Over \$11 billion in new infrastructure projects will be funded around Indian Country to begin construction on broadband internet lines, roads, bridges, and water pipelines. The Navajo Nation commends President Joe Biden and Interior

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Secretary Debra Haaland for their leadership during this pandemic,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

In November, the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act delivers \$13 billion to tribes across the United States, including:

- \$3.5 billion for the Indian Health Service (IHS) for sanitation facilities construction
- \$3 billion for the tribal transportation programs
- \$2.5 billion to address Indian water rights settlements
- \$55 billion to provide clean and safe drinking water to tribal communities
- \$2 billion for tribal broadband connectivity programs to expand internet access
- \$11.2 billion for abandoned coal mine land and water reclamation projects

“The Navajo Nation is interested in exploring helium and requests support from the Interior Department to keep helium on the critical minerals list designated by the U.S. Geological Survey. Over 500+ abandoned uranium mines need to be cleaned up by the Environmental Protection Agency which has caused a generation of health problems for our families. The federal government also has an obligation to host a field hearing to listen directly from allottees affected around the Chaco Canyon because of the proposed 10-mile buffer zone,” said Chairman Rickie Nez (T’iistsoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tsé Daa K’aan, Newcomb, San Juan).

Assistant Secretary Newland is a citizen of the Bay Mills Indian Community (Ojibwe), where he recently served as president and chief judge. From 2009 to 2012, he was a counselor and policy advisor to former Indian Affairs Assistant Secretary Larry Echo Hawk during the Obama Administration.

“Roads and bridges are the lifeline for connecting our urban and rural areas across the Navajo Nation, especially for schools, businesses, and frontline workers. The aspects of historic established roads where the BIA dropped their grader blades without the hindrance of clearances should be ‘grandfathered in’ to allow the Navajo Nation to build our road infrastructure and all necessary utilities. This ensures we meet the intent of ARPA funding rules,” said Chairman Daniel Tso (Littlewater, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake, Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Ojo Encino, Counselor).

Later this month, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) will be in Washington, D.C. to meet with federal agencies and congressional representatives to share the top priorities of the Navajo Nation.

“Navajo law enforcement and emergency medical personnel are impacted by this pandemic tremendously and how they properly respond to the needs of our communities. Rural areas on the Navajo Nation need police substations, additional fire departments, and proper support of our frontline workers. We must replace our public safety facilities and need the Interior Department to assist us with operations and maintenance of these buildings. It should not take our public safety workers hours and traveling hundreds of miles a day just to do their jobs,” said Madam Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock).

Budget and Finance Committee Chairman Jamie Henio (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee) requested support for the Navajo Exchange Legislative Initiative (NELI) bill that will be introduced to Congress this year. He added, "Further cuts for public safety projects must end and funding should be a priority for Indian Country. The Interior Department needs to promote full funding for tribal health care, public safety, and transportation programs."

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