



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation Council applauds \$2.9 Million allocation for greater internet access for Diné College students

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 29, 2022



PHOTO: Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. and Arizona Senator Mark Kelly tour a site for future cell tower development.

TSAILE, Ariz. — Speaker Seth Damon and the 24th Navajo Nation Council applaud an allocation of \$2,925,627 for the Diné College “CONNECT NAVAJO” Project to improve student internet access, providing more broadband hardware, and investing in personnel to oversee information technology (IT).

The initiative was announced today by Arizona Senator Mark Kelly and Senator Kyrsten Sinema, both supporters of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. The grant funding comes from the Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program reserved for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) to purchase broadband internet access service and eligible equipment or to hire and train IT staff.

“The Navajo Nation commends our Arizona Senators for being outspoken advocates for our Native American-serving colleges and universities. Diné College remains the first tribal college in the country and the institution continues to inspire Navajo students seeking a higher education. The CONNECT NAVAJO project will provide high speed broadband internet to our students who need it most,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatch).

– MORE –

The nearly \$3 million grant funding will be allocated to Diné College to expand and improve internet access, provide students laptops and mobile hotspots for online learning, and training in information technology for staff.

“Access to reliable internet and state of the art computers is crucial to the success of our Navajo students in the classroom. This grant ensures Diné College is prepared during this ongoing pandemic for online classes and access to the worldwide web for the most rural areas of the Navajo Nation,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain).

Starting this fall semester, in an effort to make college more accessible and increase student success, Diné College will offer 100% grants to all students to fully cover tuition, books, meals, and rent at its residential halls.

“Today’s critical funding will make a big difference for students on the Navajo Nation – expanding internet access, improving retention rate, and moving one step closer to closing the digital divide. I’m proud to help secure this necessary investment for Diné College,” said Senator Kyrsten Sinema.

In November, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act - led by Sinema and shaped by Kelly - was signed into law by President Biden appropriating over \$65 billion to expand broadband internet access and connectivity on tribal lands.

In a prepared statement, Senator Mark Kelly added, “This grant will ensure Diné College students have access to new laptops, mobile hotspots, printing kiosks, as well as professional development training. We’ll continue working to bridge the digital divide for the next generation of leaders and innovators on the Navajo Nation.”

Delegate Begay has been working with Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah state and county leaders to solve major broadband problems affecting school districts, chapter houses, and small businesses across the Navajo Nation. A broadband working group was created to ensure every Navajo student in rural and urban areas are supported during the pandemic.

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