



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee tours aftermath of Chinle flooding



On July 24, 2023, Law & Order Committee toured the devastating aftermath in the Chinle community arising from a flood that occurred three months ago.

CHINLE, Ariz. – Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council’s Law and Order Committee held a regular meeting in Chinle on Monday, to meet with constituents and hear their concerns after the community endured a flooding that devastated their homes, livestock, and property on April 21. The committee was invited by Chinle Chapter President Dr. Rosanna Jumbo-Fitch to tour the impacted areas and to assess the damage.

LOC Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton, (Shiprock), and committee members Steven R. Arviso, (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) and Nathan Notah (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’a’a’) were joined by Delegate Vince R. James, (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kinlichee, Steamboat) and Delegate Shawna Ann Claw (Chinle).

Unresolved flood issues were brought to the attention of the committee, which serves as legislative oversight for the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety (DPS) headed by Division Director, Michael Anderson, who also oversees the Department of Emergency Management (DEM). According to the Chinle Chapter President, DEM and DPS failed to respond to several detailed requests by the chapter outlining the needs of the community.

The LOC issued a directive to Director Anderson on June 12 requiring a written report on the outstanding requests submitted by the chapter almost three months previous.

Anderson's response to the directive was submitted on June 15, and was unfortunately not met in full as the former DEM Director Harland Cleveland was responsible to provide the full status report. However, Cleveland chose to step down and was transitioned to another area within DEM. In addition, according to Chapter President Jumbo-Fitch, DEM neglected to submit a request to declare Chinle a disaster with FEMA by the June deadline.

For six hours, the committee met with over 65 community members who relayed devastating experiences and trauma they endured during the disaster and reiterated the needs of the community such as manpower, removal of excess sand, septic tank repairs, removal of accumulated damaged household items, supplies to rebuild their homes and so on.

Community members expressed that without funds and manpower, they cannot recover on their own. The community acknowledged the presence of the Nation's division workers for the first few days after the flood, however many reiterated the same concerns and became emotional when stating that after a week, they were no longer on site and they had not seen any of the Nation's leadership since.

According to residents, the excess sand that has accumulated after the flood has made it difficult for the elders to walk through who are consistently trying to clean and rebuild their homesteads. Some still park along the roadways as their vehicles cannot make it through the sandy areas. They also spoke about odorous and brown, contaminated water within their home, running from their kitchen faucets and showers, as well as from outdoor water sources they use to water their livestock.

Helen Billie, a Chinle resident and retiree who dedicated over twenty years of her life working for the Nation, spoke to the committee and shared her experience.

"This has been very emotional, we have suffered, what we had to encounter, it was very traumatizing," said Billie. She expressed her gratitude for the non-profits that offered their help taking on major tasks to help restore their community and recognized Delegate Vince James for being the first delegate to arrive the following morning after the flood to walk through the area and check on community members.

"I am happy delegates are here to tour our community. It is a third world country here and you will see that. I want to know what DEM is doing, what is their plan? What we are missing here is communication with the community and accountability of our Navajo leaders," added Billie.

Delegate Vince James, who was a former Chinle high school teacher, offered the community words of encouragement and support.

"My prayers are still with you, it was devastating to see how the flooding affected a lot of you," said Delegate James. "We are here to serve our Navajo people regardless of what areas we represent, we are here to help the families that were affected by the flooding."

After the meeting with the community, LOC toured the affected areas and visited several homesites that are still in the recovery phase.



Law & Order Committee held their meeting in Chinle on July 24 to hear concerns of the community after a flooding that devastated the community in April.

Chair Charles-Newton, Delegate Arviso, and Delegate Notah walked through the mass of sand and silt that now blankets the land along with other sediments and debris from the flooding.

The committee viewed the initial and temporary berms that were placed in several locations, also viewing the current breakages of the berms that pose a risk if any future potential inclement weather should arise.

“We had a lengthy discussion with the local residents. We also took a tour of the site, it’s a very horrible situation for the people here, it would be nice if we could do more as a Nation to help one of our fellow communities,” said Delegate Notah.

An elder, Dorothy Lillie Smith opened her home to the delegates so they could see the current conditions. Bracing themselves along a handrail, the delegates walked up the dilapidated steps that were under water a few months ago. Walking on her patio and in her home was a challenge as the warped flooring was not structurally sound making it difficult and hazardous.

However, Smith has no alternative as she cannot repair the damages on her own. Her septic tank also gave way erupting from underneath her trailer leaving a four-foot-wide exposed hole. Chairwoman Charles-Newton expressed her concerns of the absence of Director Anderson stating it is a disappointment.

“There’s much work to be done, it is going to take everybody to come together to get this done. I wish everyone would come out to take a firsthand look at what these folks went through and still are going through. You have to physically be here to look upon the aftermath,” said Delegate Arviso.

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