



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 28, 2023

25th Navajo Nation Council pays tribute to the life of former Council Delegate J.C. Begay



PHOTO: Former Council Delegate J.C. Begay and his wife Grace. Begay served as a Council Delegate from 1999 to 2003.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On behalf of the 25th Navajo Nation Council, Speaker Crystalyne Curley offers condolences to the family and community of former Council Delegate J.C. Begay, who passed away with his family by his side in Colorado Springs, CO on Wednesday at the age of 84.

Begay is Táchii'nii Dinéé and born for 'Áshjiji Dinéé. His maternal grandfather is Tábaqhá Dinéé and his paternal grandfather is Hashk'ąą hadzohi Dinéé. He was originally from Red Valley, Ariz., and served as a Council Delegate from 1999 to 2003 under the 19th Navajo Nation Council. He served on the Judiciary Committee of the 88-member legislative body.

"On behalf of my colleagues of the 25th Navajo Nation Council, I offer our thoughts and prayers to former Delegate Begay's family, former colleagues, and the Red Valley community. We honor and remember his longtime service to the Navajo Nation and our communities and we pray for comfort for his loved ones," said Speaker Curley.

Begay also served as Chapter President of Red Valley Chapter, fulfilling a vacancy from 2003 to 2005. Following his service with the Navajo Nation Council, he once again served as the Red Valley Chapter President from 2017 to 2021.

"I thank and commend former Council Delegate and Red Valley Chapter President J.C. Begay for investing his time and efforts into the communities I represent and the Navajo Nation in general," said Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse'alnaozt'í'i; Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To'Koi). "I extend my gratitude and prayers to his family for sharing his leadership with the Nation."

He earned an Associate's Degree in education from Fort Lewis College, a Bachelor's Degree in education from Western State Colorado University, and a Master's from the University of New Mexico. Begay completed 60 credit hours at the University of Arizona for a doctorate in education, with his dissertation remaining, he returned to his family as he emplaced high value in supporting his children.

In 1965, J.C. Begay was selected to lead the newly launched Project Head Start that was created a year earlier under a congressional bill through President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. The Office of Navajo Economic Opportunity was created with an initial eight programs. A comprehensive pre-school program was created in which Begay was appointed by then-ONEO Executive Director Peter MacDonald. Begay remained in this position until 1969, when Head Start was transferred to the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Other career highlights include teaching at the Red Rock Day School in 1970, under the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He eventually assumed the position as school principal. He also served with the Aneth school during his service with the BIA. Begay also played an influential role in the establishment of the Red Valley/Cove High School in 2008.

Inheriting his family's commitment to land and livestock, Begay was an avid rancher in Mitten Rock and Salt Creek. He also farmed 36 acres of land in Shiprock, N.M. near the San Juan River and served as a member of the San Juan Water Users District.

He is the maternal grandson of Lee Tome (1886-1978), who served in the Navajo Tribal Council from 1943 to 1957.

J.C. Begay was married to Grace N. Begay for 63 years. His surviving daughter is Dr. J. Kaibah Begay, who currently serves as the Secretary for Shiprock Chapter and Superintendent of Shiprock Associated Schools. He has six grandchildren, and seven great grandchildren.

###