



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Speaker Curley pushes water rights, state legislative priorities, and ARPA in Winter Session report



Left to right: Miss Navajo Nation Amy Naazbah Reeves-Begaye, Navajo Nation Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne, Council Delegate Seth Damon, Speaker Crystalayne Curley and President Dr. Buu Nygren. Council Delegate Damon announced his resignation from the Navajo Nation Council to accept the position of Deputy Secretary of the N.M. Indian Affairs Department.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – During the opening day of the 2024 Winter Council Session on Monday, 25th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalayne Curley provided a report that focused on several priorities including finalizing an Arizona water rights settlement proposal, state legislative priorities, and expending American Rescue Plan Act funds for infrastructure projects.

At the start of the session, Speaker Curley recognized Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááhááí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) who recently announced his resignation as a member of the Council to accept the position of Deputy Secretary of the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department.

“In his nine years serving his communities on the Council, Speaker Damon has chaired the Budget and Finance Committee, Eastern Navajo Land Commission, and led many initiatives that have had positive impacts on our Nation. As the Speaker of the 25th Navajo Nation Council, I thank him and his family for their service and sacrifices and we pray for his continued success as he moves forward into a new endeavor,” stated Speaker Curley.

In her report, Speaker Curley highlighted the ongoing work to develop policies and procedures for the Legislative Branch and the successful passage of a first-ever plan of operation for the Office of the Speaker. Under her leadership, Speaker Curley also mandated sexual harassment prevention training for all Legislative Branch employees, which was completed in October.

“The training addressed safety in the workplace, trauma informed care, and workplace wellness. Safety in the workplace is a top priority for the Legislative Branch and we will continue to offer additional trainings for employees and Council Delegates, as we move forward into the new year. All Legislative Branch employees are mandated to complete the training on an annual basis,” said Speaker Curley.

Speaker Curley also informed the Council on Monday that she will introduce emergency legislation to address the Navajo Nation’s position regarding Utah S.B. 57, which proposes a framework that would allow the Utah State Legislature, by concurrent resolution, to prohibit the enforcement of a federal directive within the state by government officers if the Legislature determines the federal directive violates the principles of state sovereignty.

“This type of law has the potential to impact all tribes in the state [of Utah] when it comes to important issues such as the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and other federal laws. This is a major concern that we have to address with the state of Utah,” Speaker Curley stated.

In the state of Arizona, Speaker Curley spoke about the Council’s advocacy for reforms to the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) to close loopholes that allow fraudulent sober living homes to operate and victimize members of the Navajo Nation and other tribes.

Speaker Curley also noted that due to the major budget deficit in the state of Arizona, state legislators will have to make difficult decisions when it comes to funding programs such as the Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program, also known as the school voucher program that was originally intended to provide financial assistance to parents for charter, private, or home schooling.

“During discussions with state legislators, my colleagues explained that this program does not benefit students on the Navajo Nation due to low numbers of charter and private schools. Navajo leadership expressed concerns over the growing cost of the program relative to needed investments in the state public education system on the Navajo Nation. We will continue to propose alternative options that will benefit students residing on our Nation,” Speaker Curley wrote in the report.

In New Mexico, the Council continues to focus its efforts on the completion of New Mexico Capital Outlay funded projects and proposing new measures such as streamlining processes including removing or amending the requirement to obligate five-percent of an appropriated amount within six months of acceptance of an Intergovernmental Grant Agreement and allowing for the delegation of the signing authority of the Navajo Nation President to expedite the timeline.

Regarding a proposed water rights settlement in Arizona, Speaker Curley noted that the Navajo

Nation Council, Navajo Nation Water Rights Commission, Attorney General Ethel Branch, and the Executive Branch will begin hosting public education sessions at the end of January in various Arizona communities to present information regarding proposed Colorado River settlements.

“It is very important that our Navajo people are informed and that we proceed carefully to ensure that our communities receive much needed water resources that can sustain generations to come,” stated Speaker Curley.

The report also highlights the 25th Navajo Nation Council’s continued work with the Executive Branch to provide support and direction to ensure that ARPA funds are obligated or expended as soon as possible. Nearly all Council Delegates have introduced legislation to allocate the \$8.8 million per delegate region. In December, the Council held a weeklong work session to further the work with the Executive Branch for ARPA planning and spending.

“The encumbrance and expenditure of ARPA funds is a challenging task that requires a great amount of coordination and communication with the Executive Branch. I fully understand the urgency to expend ARPA funds, especially for infrastructure projects that will deliver water, electricity, housing, and other needs for communities and residents. As we move forward, we will schedule additional meetings with the Office of the President and Vice President to work through obstacles and identify solutions to expedite the process,” Speaker Curley said.

On Monday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council voted 11-2 to accept Speaker Curley’s report, along with other written reports for the Winter Council Session. To view the full written report, please visit: <https://www.navajonationcouncil.org/committees/>.

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