



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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25th Navajo Nation Council celebrates the strength of Diné women leadership



Women Council Delegates from past and present were honored with a recognition ceremony on the second day of the 2024 Spring Council Session.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Tuesday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council recognized the resilience and leadership of Diné women who have served the Navajo people as previous members of the Council.

25th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) said many of the women leaders expressed that they have never received any official acknowledgement or appreciation from the Navajo Nation following their years of service.

“We’re here now to thank you and your families. They have sacrificed so much so that you could serve your people,” said Speaker Curley. “You laid the foundation for myself and other woman council delegates to serve on the 25th Navajo Nation Council. I would not be here today, in this position, without you all.”

Council Delegates Germaine Simonson, Eugenia Charles-Newton, and Amber Kanazbah Crotty attended a breakfast recognition ceremony, where the women leaders gathered to share their



Speaker Crystalyne Curley joined the family of the first woman Council Delegate Lilakai Julian Neil who brought news articles that were written about her.

experiences and the challenges they faced as they forged a new path for Navajo women as elected leaders.

In 2023, the Navajo Nation celebrated the centennial of the Navajo Nation government. It's been 78 years since Lilakai Julian Neil was the first woman to be elected as a Council Delegate. Since 1946, the Navajo Nation has elected 30 women Council Delegates.

Last year, the Navajo Nation made history by electing Richelle Montoya as the first woman to serve as Navajo Nation Vice President. History was also made when the 25th Navajo Nation Council elected Crystalyne Curley as Speaker of the Council.

Vice President Montoya said that when she decided to run for her position that she sought the advice of other woman leaders like former Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Dennehotso, Chilchinbeto, Kayenta).

"She's very knowledgeable and very outspoken. That's how our delegates are meant to be. Thank you all so much for blazing the trail," Vice President Montoya said. "It's not only in tribal politics. It's also in local, state, and county politics. We listen to you, and we watch what you've done."

Benally said that in 2003, there were many double standards in place that held women leaders back. She feels that women were belittled at that time and were not allowed to speak their minds.

"I don't see that anymore. I see a lot of respect and I must credit the nice gentlemen that are holding seats in the council chamber," Benally said.

LaVern Wagner was the first woman to represent her chapter region in 2003, and she remains the only woman to have represented the communities of Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, and Whitehorse Lake.

Wagner said that women delegates work 24 hours a day in their responsibilities to both family and work, and that today's women leaders still face the same challenges.

"We face a lot of hardship. We go back to our traditional teachings from our grandparents of how to stay strong. That's where I connect with the women leaders of the past to the present. It's all our duties to keep the Navajo Nation going strong. I'm happy to have served at the time I did," Wagner said.

Former Shiprock Council Delegate GloJean Todacheene said that politics is the art of influence.

"That's what you ladies have. Along the way, we've influenced a lot of people. We influence the young ones who are coming up. With the power of women leadership, you don't ignore each other. You bring each other up," Todacheene said.

At the start of Tuesday's Council session, 30 former woman Council Delegates were honored and acknowledged in the Council Chamber for their leadership and contributions to the prosperity of the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton said the power of women's leadership encompasses love, compassion, and self-identity.

"These women being honored today are so important to what our government has become. They laid the foundation for many of us and cleared the path to make it possible for us to be here today," Delegate Charles-Newton said.

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