

NAVAJO NATION WASHINGTON OFFICE  
FISCAL YEAR 2024



**NAVAJO NATION**  
WASHINGTON OFFICE

# QUARTERLY REPORT

JANUARY 2024 - MARCH 2024

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is with great honor that I present to you the Navajo Nation Washington Office (NNWO)'s quarterly report for the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2024. Our efforts continue to be driven by our mission to advocate for and protect the sovereignty of the Navajo Nation, ensuring that our voice is heard, and our interests are represented at the federal level. This quarter has been pivotal in advancing our strategic goals and enhancing the well-being of our people through key campaigns, testimonies, and tribal consultations.

The NNWO has been at the forefront of several campaigns focused on crucial issues such as water rights, infrastructure development, and environmental protection. We continue the "RECA" initiative to address the harmful legacy of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation and have begun new initiatives to work with our leaders in Window Rock to advance our water rights discussions.

Our office has facilitated a series of testimonies before Congress, emphasizing the Navajo Nation's priorities. Notably, we have addressed the critical need for improved healthcare for veterans and the promotion of the need to diversify tribal economies. These testimonies have been instrumental in influencing legislative actions aimed at addressing disparities and promoting equity for our people.

The NNWO has consistently engaged in tribal consultations with various federal agencies, ensuring that any federal activity considers the impact on Navajo lands and respects our sovereignty. This quarter, we successfully participated in several rounds of consultation advancing the Nation's priorities as it relates to the use of funds under the American Rescue Plan Act.

Our persistent engagement with federal lawmakers has resulted in positive developments in policy areas central to the Navajo Nation's interests. Recently we have been focused on preserving cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Navajo people, especially preserving the natural environment of our celestial bodies.

As we move into the next quarter, the NNWO will continue to prioritize the interest of the Navajo Nation, particularly in the wake of the ongoing challenges posed by the actions of Congress to reduce federal appropriations for several Indian Affairs programs. We will maintain our steadfast commitment to advancing the interests of the Navajo Nation through strategic policy advocacy and robust engagement with federal stakeholders.



  
**JUSTIN AHASTEEN**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# OUR MISSION

To represent the Navajo people by working with the White House, Congress, and federal agencies to develop federal laws, policies, executive orders, and practices that reinforce the federal trust responsibility, respect tribal sovereignty, and achieve the priorities of the Navajo Nation.



# OUR VISION

NNWO is an extension of the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President and Navajo Nation Council. As ambassadors of the Navajo Nation government in Washington, DC, we champion the priorities of the Navajo people in government-to-government negotiations with federal decision makers. We also engage with non-governmental, private sector, and academic stakeholders in initiatives to realize our role. NNWO also serves as a de-facto embassy—a "home away from home"—for the DC, Maryland and Virginia based Diné and visitors.

# OUR PURPOSE

1

**Enhance** - Exist as an extension of the Navajo Nation government in Washington, DC, representing the Navajo Nation government's concerns to the United States Congress and federal agencies. In doing so, we enhance the success of the Nation's goals and objectives by strengthening influence of the Nation over the activities of the federal government.

2

**Maintain** - Maintain a Navajo presence in Washington DC that would emphasize the government-to-government relationship thereby improving the capacity of the Navajo people to govern and represent themselves. NNWO provides the Navajo Nation government with easy and rapid access to Congress, the administration, and federal agencies.

3

**Monitor** - Monitor and analyze congressional legislation and activities of committees and subcommittees that affect the Navajo Nation, as well as federal administration activities, specifically those that administer Indian programs.

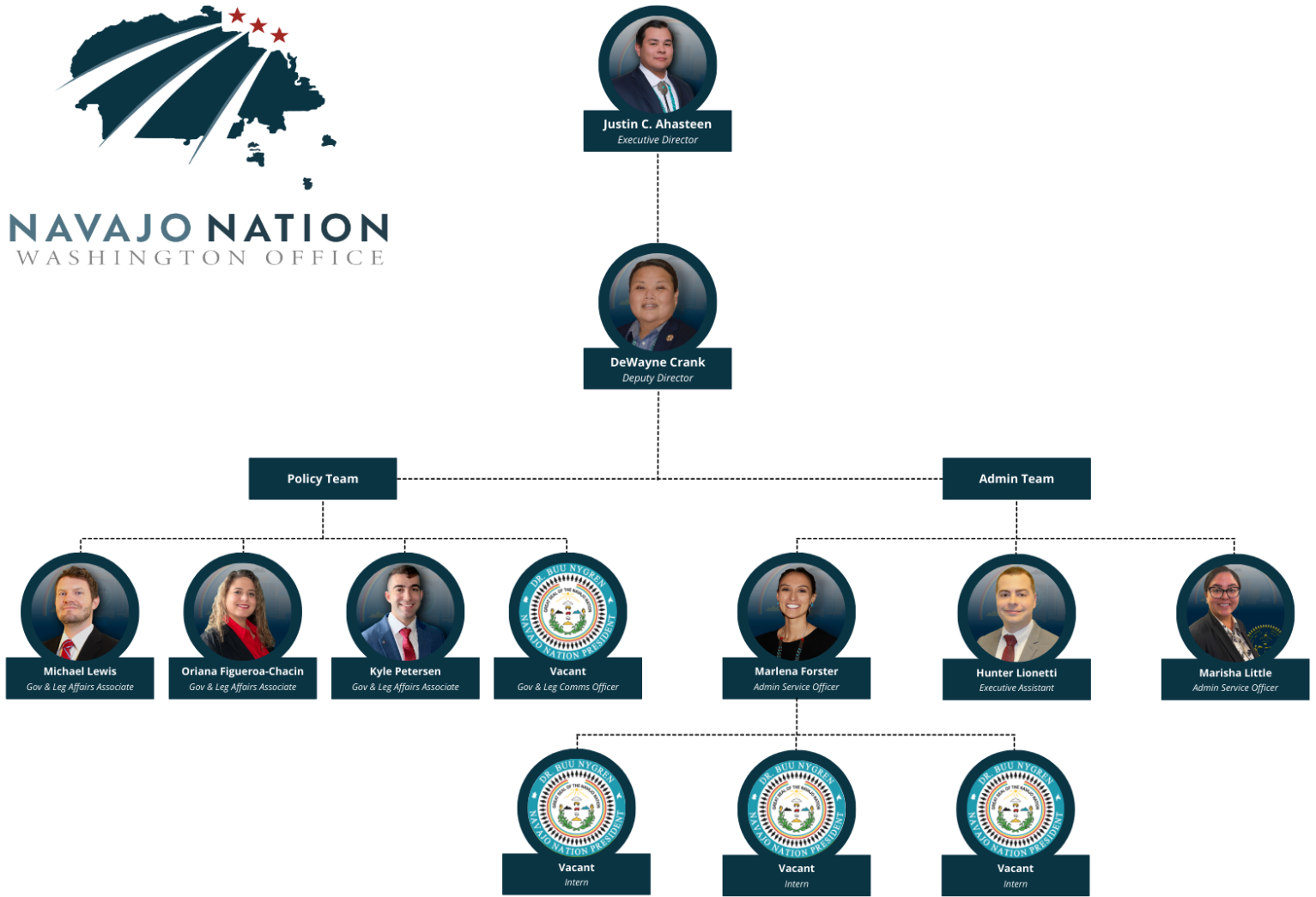
4

**Distribute** - Distribute to the Navajo Nation government information concerning congressional and administrative activities that affect the welfare of the Navajo Nation and provide advice regarding alternatives that exist in developing strategies and decisions concerning Navajo programs, policies, budgets, and any other areas of concerns to the Navajo Nation.

5

**Assist** - Provide assistance to Navajo Nation government entities conducting Navajo Nation business in Washington, DC. Assist in the preparation of legislative proposals and testimony before Congress.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



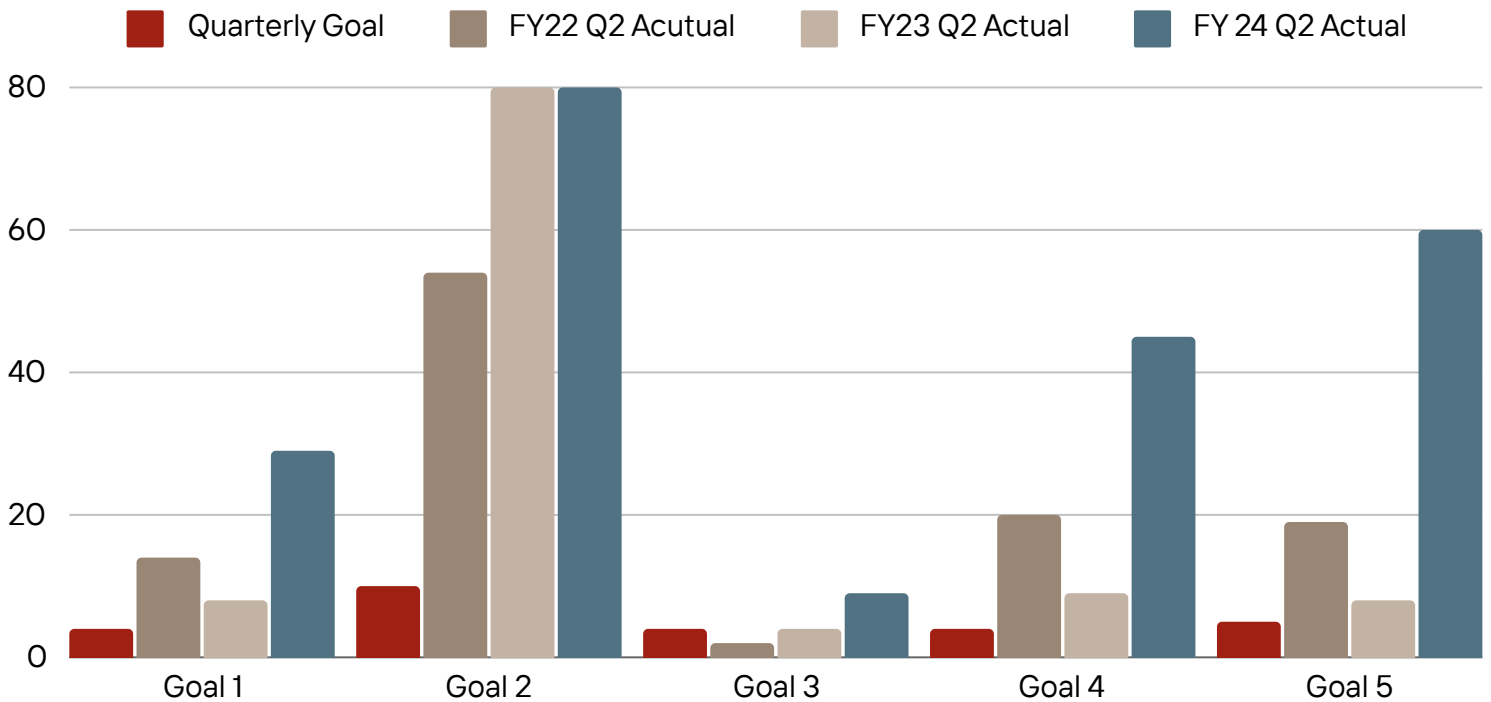
# QUARTER 2 IN REVIEW

During this fiscal quarter, the Navajo Nation Washington Office (NNWO) has achieved remarkable progress in meeting and surpassing our performance goals. Our core objectives included the timely publication and distribution of legislative news, alerts, and press releases; the effective coordination of work sessions and meetings between Navajo Nation leaders, government officials, and federal agencies; vigilant monitoring of congressional activities relevant to the Navajo Nation government; active facilitation of the Navajo Nation’s engagement in legislative and appropriations processes; and the consistent publication of weekly federal notices pertaining to grants and regulations.

The substantial improvement in our office's performance is directly related to the successful onboarding of our new policy staff.

The enhanced team has demonstrated a swift adaptation to the dynamic environment of Washington D.C. and has brought valuable experience from previous policy-related roles. This has led to increased efficiency and effectiveness in our operations.

Comparative data from this quarter against the same period in previous fiscal years indicate that we have not only met but exceeded our targets across all five performance goals. This achievement underscores the capacity and dedication of our policy staff and their commitment to advancing the interests of the Navajo Nation at the federal level. We look forward to continuing this trajectory of excellence and further strengthening our advocacy efforts on behalf of the Navajo people.



- Goal 1:** Publish and distribute legislative news, alerts, and other press releases.
- Goal 2:** Coordinate work session meetings between NN Government officials and federal agencies.
- Goal 3:** Monitor Congressional activities for the Navajo Nation government.
- Goal 4:** Facilitate the Navajo Nation's participation in the legislative and appropriations process.
- Goal 5:** Publish weekly federal notices regarding grants and regulations.



# 29

press releases, news blasts, or reports on Congressional/Federal activity that NNWO has distributed in Quarter 2

# 80

worksession meetings with congressional and federal agencies to further the priorities of the Nation

# 9

congressional hearings attended and reported on

# 45

deliverables completed including testimonies, briefings, written comments, talking points, one-pagers and white papers





## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### RADIATION EXPOSURE COMPENSATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT

After months of advocacy efforts by our Office and partner groups, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act, S. 3853, was passed by the United States Senate. The legislation was sponsored by Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO), and co-sponsored by numerous Senators, including Lujan and Heinrich (NM); Crapo (R-ID); Schmitt (R-MO); and Kelly (D-AZ) and Sinema (I-AZ).

Ahead of the vote, Navajo victims of radiation exposure Leslie Begay and Phil Harrison Jr. came to Washington to advocate with the staff of NNWO. In a two-day blitz, over a dozen members were met with and interviews were held with journalists from numerous news agencies. On Thursday, March 7, 2024, the Reauthorization Act was passed in the Senate with broad bipartisan support, 69-30. We continue to push this bill in the House, which will extend the RECA program an additional six years and expand coverage to thousands more victims.

### CONGRESSIONAL EARMARK FOR MANY FARMS, AZ ANIMAL SHELTER

Congresswoman Teresa Leger-Fernandez's allocation of \$1 million to the Navajo Nation for a new animal shelter marks a pivotal step in addressing the region's feral dog crisis. With the support of Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren and Resolution CJY-59-18, the project aims to replace a dilapidated structure and enhance animal welfare services. Beyond sheltering and care, the facility will serve as an educational center, promoting responsible pet ownership and humane treatment of animals to foster long-term change.

This initiative reflects a collaborative effort between government and community leaders to create a safer environment for both people and animals. By addressing the root causes of the crisis and providing comprehensive services, the Navajo Nation seeks to mitigate the risks of feral dog attacks while promoting compassion and responsibility within the community.

# TRIBAL CONSULTATIONS

## JANUARY 24 SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

The submitted comments are in response to the Virtual Tribal Listening Session held on January 4th, 2024, regarding the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ("DHHS") Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ("SAMHSA") 2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention ("NSSP"). As a provision of the 1868 treaty between the United States and the Navajo Nation ("Nation"), the U.S. government is legally and morally bound to support the Nation in addressing mental health issues being faced, including suicide (which is the 7th leading cause of death for Navajo adolescents). Upon seeing the new Strategic Directions and Goals of the NSSP, the Nation agrees that community-based suicide prevention is essential and there should be a focus on increasing the number of strength-based, trauma-informed, traditional healing services, that are in line with cultural customs and practices. That said, the Nation is firm in the belief that New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado should support traditional practices as reimbursable services; it has been found that combining Western medicine and traditional healing practices produces better health outcomes than the use of Western medicine alone.

The Nation also urges the government to continue investing in Crisis Services within the Nation, as there are only 12 hardly accessible Indian Health Service facilities available to the Nation's citizens. To continue this investment, the Nation would like to see: more grants for Mobile Crisis Response teams, further funding opportunities for the Navajo Treatment Center for Children and Their Families ("NTCCF"), SAMHSA contacting tribal leaders responsible for their tribes' mental health services, and directly concentrated efforts from SAMHSA (including listening sessions, consultations, and letters) to ensure the proper implementation of the NSSP.

## JANUARY 26 ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

The submitted comments are in response to the December 20, 2023 Dear Tribal Leader Letter about DHHS' Office of Family Assistance ("OFA") publication of a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking ("NPRM") to amend the state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ("TANF") program regulations to strengthen the safety net and reduce administrative burden; the proposed rule includes seven changes to the current TANF regulations.

The Nation advocates for Tribal flexibility in the design (including the definition of "needy") and administration of TANF programs in response to two of the proposed rule changes: for TANF, state definitions of "needy" may not exceed 200% of the federal poverty guideline and to clarify when an expenditure is "reasonably calculated to accomplish a TANF purpose." This would define it to mean expenditures that a reasonable person would consider to be within one or more of the enumerated four purposes of the TANF Program; this would undercut the statutory requirements that TANF provide out-of-home maintenance payments or foster care. As such, the Nation believes tribes should be given the flexibility to design and administer their own programs.

Lastly, one of the proposed rules applies to information, namely the development of new criteria to allow states to use alternative Income and Eligibility Verification System ("IEVS") measures; the Nation believes Tribal TANF Programs should be provided with access to information available to states to verify income.

# TRIBAL CONSULTATIONS

## JANUARY 26 DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

The submitted comments provide response to the Dear Tribal Leader Letter regarding the input on the revised agreement between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA") and Indian Health Service ("IHS"). The revised agreement facilitates reimbursement by the VA to HIS for health care and related services provided by the HIS to eligible American Indian and Alaska Native ("AI/AN") veterans.

The Nation strongly supports the purchased/referred care section of the agreement because it will expand access to health care for Navajo veterans and provide them with more options for services. The Nation also advocates for the reinstating of the Carl T. Hayden Traditional Healing Program, which benefitted many veterans by allowing them to go through a cleansing ceremony after their time in service or war. In order to increase attendance at Veteran healthcare facilities, the Nation urges the VA to create a program that supports the sharing of medical records across different agencies and to include accredited Native Veteran Service Officers, in the healthcare scene, who understand issues of cultural significance and Tribal language. The Nation also implores IHS facilities to properly register service members as veterans, so they may receive proper and deserved care because of their status. In order to help the growing suicide epidemic, the Nation states the importance of suicide prevention services being made available to veterans across all areas of the reservation.

## JANUARY 30 DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The submitted comments provide feedback on the Indian Community Development Block Grant ("ICDBG") Program Regulations. This submission is a result of a Dear Tribal Leader Letter from June 29th, 2023, in which the Office of Native American Programs ("ONAP") requested feedback on eligible and ineligible activities, regional ONAP allocations, compliance with the primary objective, rating factors included in the notice of funding opportunity, and imminent threat grants.

Pertaining to eligible and ineligible activities, the Nation feels that eligibility should be streamlined, through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") providing a detailed list of approved and disapproved activities in each fiscal year, and certifiable by tribal organizations through a tribal council resolution rather than a letter from IHS or the Bureau of Indian Affairs ("BIA"). The Nation feels that regional ONAP allocations by HUD should include a multi-dimensional funding formula that considers enrolled members living on the reservation, a scaling factor that accounts for the size of lands, adjustments for rural disparities, and environmental factors. ONAP scoring should be consistent and transparent across all regions, allowing for an equitable competition structure wherein tribes are evaluated with those of similar metrics.

The Nation feels that, with compliance to the primary objective, HUD should include greater area and tribal flexibility, as each tribe has distinct needs that must be met. That said, the Nation also urges HUD to change income survey requirements to include the use of general income poverty percentages and unemployment percentages. Pertaining to rating factors included in the Notice of Funding Opportunity ("NOFO"), the Nation advocates for the streamlining of NOFOs, the sending of NOFO to the tribes by the HUD area office within 48 hours, the full assessment of applications (regardless of the application's score on the capacity factor). The Nation feels the review and award of imminent threat grants should be streamlined.

# TRIBAL CONSULTATIONS

## JANUARY 30 DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

The Navajo Nation ("Nation") supplied written comments, dated January 30th, to the Department of Energy ("DOE") regarding the Department's Draft Consultation Order and Policy.

While the Nation appreciates the steps taken by the Department of Energy ("DOE") to respect the sovereignty of Tribes, we believe that in the development of a staff training program on Consultations, Tribes should be included, and we suggest a working group be developed with Tribal representative.

Furthermore, the Nation suggests that DOE assume that all programmatic and policy changes assume an impact on Tribal nations, thereby requiring consultation. In conducting consultations, it is the stance of the Nation that DOE follow the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent Standard of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as provide a feedback mechanism for Tribes on the conduct of DOE staff in Consultations.

The Nation appreciates the 30 day-minimum notice of Consultations, but believes that more notice is effective, and that DOE should consult with other agencies and develop a schedule to avoid overlap. Lastly, the Nation supports the inclusion of a Tribal Liaison Officer, but encourages due caution be used if and when the Officer is a member of a Tribal nation with adverse interests to certain tribes, and recuse themselves in such instances.

## FEBRUARY 20 INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

The Navajo Nation submitted written comments to the Indian Health Service's Director's Advisory Workgroup on Tribal Consultation, which had solicited feedback on which definition of "Indian Tribe" to use.

The Nation maintained our position supporting the use of "the List Act definition" of Indian Tribe (25 U.S.C. 5130). We stand by this definition as it does not include Alaskan Native Corporations, which are for-profit councils, not Tribal governments. Furthermore, this is the definition utilized in Executive Order 17315. Lastly, other definitions run the risk of including Urban Indian Organizations and other advocacy groups, which, while they may represent the interests of Native Americans, are not Tribal Governments.

## FEBRUARY 21 VETERANS AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION

Ahead of the meeting to be held February 27-29 in Durant, Oklahoma, the Nation responded to the Dear Tribal Leader Letter from the VA, highlighting issues of concerns to Diné veterans.

Better healthcare for female veterans, who suffer from disproportionately negative health concerns, was chief among our concerns. Specifically in addressing breast cancer, the suggestion was made for mobile medical facilities that could conduct mammograms and other screenings.

Respect for tribal sovereignty in accepting traditional healing and the inter-agency sharing of medical records (i.e. between VA and HIS) is an important way to enable access for Native veterans to the benefits they are owed for their service, as well as the establishment of a Veterans Benefit Administration Center on the reservation. The Nation has already secured a location for such a center, near Window Rock and the future site of the Navajo Code Talkers museum and is only waiting for the VA to act on this matter.

Access to mental health care and suicide prevention programs would address the epidemic of mental health for Veterans. Lastly, to better serve Veterans, the Nation encourages the expansion of Veteran Services Officers, currently trained and funded at great cost to the Nation, by the VA as well as encouraging IHS to ask patients about their Veteran status.

# TRIBAL CONSULTATIONS

## FEBRUARY 28 DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The submitted comments provide feedback on the Office for American Indian, Alaska Natives & Hawaiian Programs' draft consultation policy, as discussed in the December 21st, 2023 Dear Tribal Leader Letter. As reaffirmed by President Biden's Executive Order 13175, tribal consultation should be meaningful and occur early in the decision-making process, emphasizing consistent respect for tribal sovereignty, even if it is not convenient for the federal agency. Meaningful consultation must follow the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent standard established by the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This includes providing Tribes early notification and consultation before a decision is made by the federal government, fully informing Tribes of the details and considerations relating to the decision and providing Tribes with a meaningful opportunity to respond in writing and at in-person meetings regarding the proposed decision. The Nation urges the Administration for Community Living ("ACL") to adopt the definition of Indian Tribes provided in the List Act, as it is directly referenced in E.O. 13175 and correctly identifies entities with the authority to make decisions on behalf of tribal members.

Under this standard, the Nation recommends the ACL adopt a policy of a 60-day notice period for consultation and works with other federal agencies to adopt an agency-wide consultation schedule for each fiscal year. The Nation posits that consultation should include high-ranking and able officials, specifically those who have been trained on the history of Indigenous Nations, who are fully prepared to engage in transparent, meaningful, and equal-to-equal conversations. Beyond this, there should also be a tribal liaison involved in internal decision-making processes that can influence rather than merely advise outcomes. Regarding the consultations themselves, the Nation recommends that there always be an option to participate through either in-person or virtual consultation. After a meeting, the Nation believes the ACL should provide written explanations on why and how they did or did not implement each comment.

## MARCH 5 CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, HEALTH, AND HUMAN SERVICES

The Nation wrote a letter to the Acting Director of the Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs at Health and Human Services ("HHS") regarding data sharing and Tribal Epidemiology Centers ("TECs").

HHS routinely fails to provide Tribal governments and TECs access to data, including tribal data, that they collect. This data is regularly shared with federal, state, and local partners, but not Tribal. Data sovereignty is an essential part of respecting Tribal Sovereignty, and the Nation maintains the belief that sharing this data with TECs and Tribal governments is key.

# TESTIMONIES

**JANUARY 11**

## **RURAL ACCESS: IS VA MEETING ALL VETERANS WHERE THEY LIVE?**

President Nygren testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs hearing on January 11th titled Rural Access: Is VA Meeting All Veterans Where They Live? In his oral testimony, the President emphasized the storied history of Native Americans in the Armed Forces, and the distinct dedication of the Navajo Code Talkers.

President Nygren then spoke to the chronic failure of the Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA") in meeting the needs of Diné veterans, who have to drive over three hours to VA health centers to access the basic medical care they are owed for their service, as IHS does not work with the VA. Rural veterans on the Navajo Nation face extreme social detriments, high rates of poverty and unemployment, connectivity/broadband issues, and limited means of transportation inhibiting their access to these facilities.

The President made an official request before Congress to establish a full-service VA medical clinic on the Nation to better serve Diné veterans and those of surrounding border towns and communities.



The Honorable Dr. Buu Nygren  
**President of the Navajo Nation**

*Committee:* House Committee on  
Veterans' Affairs

***"Their valor and ingenuity exemplify the patriotism and sacrifice that is a hallmark of the Navajo People"***

# TESTIMONIES

**FEBRUARY 15**

## **ECONOMIC DIVERSITY TO CREATE PROSPEROUS TRIBAL ECONOMIES**

On February 15th, Justin Ahasteen, the Executive Director of the Navajo Nation Washington Office, delivered testimony on behalf of the Navajo Nation President, Dr. Buu Nygren, to the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs. Titled "Economic Diversification to Create Prosperous Tribal Economies," the testimony shed light on the multifaceted challenges hindering most of our Tribal Nations' pursuit of economic development across various sectors.

Mr. Ahasteen underscored the imperative of economic diversification for Tribal Nations, emphasizing its pivotal role in advancing tribal self-determination and sovereignty. Despite its status as one of the largest Native American Tribes, the Navajo Nation confronts formidable social and economic hurdles, including inadequate infrastructure and a staggering 57% unemployment rate. These challenges strain the Navajo Nation government's capacity to deliver essential services to its people. Moreover, complex tax jurisdictions deter non-Navajo companies from investing in the Nation due to concerns about double taxation. In his testimony, Mr. Ahasteen proposed collaborative solutions to address these challenges, emphasizing the need for concerted efforts among stakeholders.

Mr. Ahasteen concluded his testimony by highlighting the adverse impact of declining revenue from the Navajo Nation's mining sector, exacerbated by bureaucratic hurdles and inadequate federal funding. He cited jurisdictional conflicts between federal agencies hampering infrastructure projects, exemplified by the cumbersome process of obtaining multiple environmental clearances for the same project. "We have to obtain three different environmental clearances for the same project. The federal agencies are not talking or working with one another; a specific example is with our road projects within the Navajo Department of Transportation. The Federal Highways Administration will go through their environmental clearance processes, but the BIA will require processes of their own and will not accept the Federal Highways environmental clearance documents," lamented Mr. Ahasteen. Such challenges surely have led to stalled or abandoned projects among other Tribal Nations.



Justin Ahasteen, Executive Director  
**Navajo Nation Washington Office**

*Committee:* House Committee on  
Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Indian and  
Insular Affairs

*"If I were to summarize the  
history of the Navajo  
economy in just a few words,  
I would say, 'interrupted  
progress'"*

# CAMPAIGNS



*Senator Hawley stands alongside radiation exposure victims and advocacy groups moments before the vote*



*Senator Hawley and Director Ahasteen engage with reporters to advocate for RECA*



*Congresswoman Leger-Fernandez congratulates exposure victims and advocacy groups after RECA passes the Senate*

## RADIATION EXPOSURE COMPENSATION ACT

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) of 1990 provides one-time compensation to people impacted by America's uranium industry and nuclear development programs. An untold number were exposed to radiation through employment in the uranium industry, and aboveground and underground weapons testing.

Administered by the U.S. Department of Justice, RECA has awarded over \$2.4 billion to more than 37,000 claimants. The compensation program is set to expire On June 7, 2024. Expansion is needed to advance justice for those who were adversely impacted by radiation exposure and are not eligible for compensation under the existing RECA framework. It does not adequately cover the range of harmful medical conditions resulting from radiation exposure.

RECA limits eligibility to select uranium workers employed before 1971. However, many Navajos were employed as uranium workers after 1971 to support the United States' policy to protect and develop domestic uranium mining in support of the Nation's power needs, and to stockpile uranium as a critical asset for national defense. Despite being excluded from compensation under current law, uranium workers employed after 1971 experience radiation induced illnesses just as pervasive and severe as those uranium workers employed before 1971. Other mine workers, like core drillers, are not covered under the current framework regardless of when they worked.



# CAMPAIGNS

## RADIATION EXPOSURE COMPENSATION ACT

The U.S. Senate has recently passed the Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act with a vote of 69-30, showing strong bipartisan support for those affected by radiation.

The Act, championed by Senator Josh Hawley and supported by senators from Arizona, New Mexico, Idaho, and Missouri, among others, is designed to provide extended assistance and recognition to the individuals who have suffered from the serious health consequences due to their exposure to radioactive materials from nuclear weapon development and testing.

President Nygren expressed deep gratitude for the unwavering support received throughout the legislative process, acknowledging the impact this bill could have on our community.

The Navajo Nation Washington Office is advocating for the House of Representatives to prioritize this legislation and continue the bipartisan momentum. The goal is to ensure that Navajo uranium mine workers and affected families receive the help and justice they deserve. As the bill progresses, we are hopeful and determined to see it serve as a testament to Congress' commitment to the well-being of affected communities and a step towards healing.

Here are the key benefits that the Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act promises:

- The Act will extend the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) for an additional six years.
- It expands eligibility to more states and territories, allowing more "downwinders," or those affected by nuclear testing fallout, to seek compensation.
- Chronic lymphocytic leukemia is now recognized as a condition eligible for compensation.
- The scope of eligible uranium workers is broadened, with more worker categories included.
- Chronic kidney diseases for uranium miners are now listed as compensable conditions.
- A new grant program will be established to research the long-term health impacts of uranium mining.
- Work history documentation for claims has been made more flexible, including the acceptance of affidavits.
- Specific communities impacted by nuclear waste and contamination are now recognized.
- A cooperative agreement will be mandated to protect human and ecological health at the Amchitka, Alaska site.
- Compensation amounts will be increased, and those who have previously made claims are allowed to receive adjusted benefits.
- The Act commissions a study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to examine the unmet medical needs of downwinders and to provide recommendations for improvement.

# CAMPAIGNS

## DEPOSITION OF HUMAN REMAINS ON THE MOON

Ahead of the January 8th launch of the Centaur Voyager rocket, carrying the Peregrine Mission One lunar landing module. Included amongst the payloads of this lander were human remains by Celestis Memorial Spaceflights and Elysium Space, two companies who specialize in sending human remains to outer space. As soon as our office was made aware of this issue, Director Ahasteen and President Nygren voice their concern to media outlets and launched a campaign to delay the launch until Tribal Consultations were conducted.

After the Luna Prospector mission in 1998, which similarly sent human remains to the Moon, then-President Albert Hale communicated with NASA administrators, who issued a public apology and promised to consult with Native American leaders ahead of any future launches of remains were made. The Peregrine Mission directly failed to live up to this promise, and the promises made in Executive Order 13175 and reaffirmed under President Biden's Memo on *Tribal Consultations and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships*.

Multiple letters were sent to Administration Officials, leading to a meeting with the White House, US Department of Transportation, and NASA on January 5. We also sought support from other Tribal nations, with the Coalition of Large Tribes and Quapaw Nation signing onto a letter seeking to delay the launch. While the Mission ultimately launched as scheduled, the story garnered international media attention, and brought to renewed attention to indigenous rights.

The Navajo Nation, under the leadership of President Buu Nygren, is pushing for a space policy that respects both the spiritual beliefs of tribal nations and the diverse cultures of humanity as space exploration advances. NNWOs involvement continues to emphasize the need to reverse historical patterns of cultural suppression and to honor indigenous sovereignty and traditions in space policy. The Navajo Nation is advocating not only for the protection of sacred celestial sites but also for active participation in shaping future space exploration.



# CAMPAIGNS

## WATER RIGHTS

Currently, the Navajo Nation Washington Office staff is prioritizing the NGWSP as we approach a critical deadline of December 31, 2024. Without reauthorization and increased funding, the San Juan Settlement and Project completion would be threatened, leading to increased costs, worsening the drinking water crisis, and causing uncertainty for water users in the San Juan River Basin. President Nygren urged the committee to support the swift passage of S. 1898, Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project Amendments Act of 2023.

On November 15, 2023, Senator Ben Ray Lujan introduced an amendment during the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Business Session to allow the storage and conveyance of water crucial for successfully implementing the Navajo-Utah Water Rights Settlement Act of 2020. The amendment permits the treatment, storage, or conveyance of up to 2000 acre-feet of non-NGWSP Project water through an Indian Health Service (IHS) pipeline known as the Sweetwater pipeline, extending into Utah. Importantly, no additional costs will be incurred, and the allocated water will be applied against the Navajo apportionment in the State of Utah, as outlined in the Navajo-Utah Water Rights Settlement Act. The Navajo Nation supports this amendment.

On February 29th, Navajo Nation announced it was near completion of a proposed agreement to settle all of its water rights claims in the State of Arizona. Parties to this include the United States, Arizona, Hopi Tribe, and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe. The proposed settlement offers a path forward to close the severe water access equity gap in our communities.

## OFFICE OF NAVAJO-HOPI INDIAN RELOCATION

The Navajo Nation is deeply concerned about the lack of a presidentially appointed Commissioner for ONHIR since 1994 and a formal commission overseeing the agency's operations. This leadership vacuum raises questions about the agency's accountability, effectiveness, and ability to fulfill its mandated responsibilities. NNWO urges Congress to request the GAO to examine the implications of the prolonged vacancy in the Commissioner position and the absence of a formal commission for ONHIR and provide recommendations for ensuring robust governance and oversight mechanisms within the agency.

In the absence of a formal Commissioner, there have been concerning reports regarding the quality of construction in homes provided as part of the relocation process overseen by ONHIR. Numerous individuals have complained about poor construction standards, resulting in substandard living conditions for relocations. The GAO urgently needs to investigate these allegations to determine the extent of the problem, identify the root cause, and recommend appropriate remedial actions to ensure that all individuals undergoing relocation are provided with safe and habitable housing.



## OUTREACH

### 70TH AND 71ST ATTORNEY GENERAL'S AWARDS

On January 31, Attorney General Garland hosted a joint event for the 70th and 71st Annual Attorney General's Awards at Constitution Hall. At this event, two Diné were recognized with the Attorney General's Award for Outstanding Contributions to Community Partnerships for Public Safety for their work in combatting the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons epidemic. Reycita Billie and Dawn Begay met with NNWO staff after receiving their awards, and met with the NNWO staff at the offices the following morning.



### TRIBAL INTERIOR BUDGET COMMITTEE

The week of March 18, the annual Tribal Interior Budget Committee conference was held here in Washington. TIBC is a meeting of Tribal delegates and leaders from the Department of the Interior, aimed at helping DOI make informed decisions about funding ahead of the upcoming fiscal year submissions. Navajo Council Delegates, the Speaker, and President Nygren came to Washington to attend the conference, and NNWO helped facilitate meetings with members of Congress and the Biden Administration for the visiting Navajo leaders.



# OUTREACH

## PANEL EVENTS



*Right: Director Ahasteen speaks as a panelist at the DC Film Festival shedding light on the enduring legacy of nuclear weapons testing*

## DC FILM FESTIVAL

On February 23, 2024, Director Ahasteen participated in a panel discussion regarding the legacy of uranium mining in the United States and Kazakhstan. This insightful discussion followed a screening of *Where the Wind Blew*, an independent documentary film highlighting the survivors of the unethical testing near population centers. In addition to Director Ahasteen, the other panelists included the film's director, a nuclear policy expert, and a journalist who previously reported on this issue.

The Beyond Earth Institute hosted a panel discussion titled "Sacred Skies: Integrating Diverse Spiritual Perspectives in Space Policy," aimed at addressing the intersection of space exploration and sacred traditions. Director Ahasteen was among the panelists, including academic and space policy experts, advocating for the importance of celestial bodies in Navajo spirituality and the recognition of indigenous sovereignty in space policy. The discussion underscored the Moon's spiritual significance for the Navajo people and the critical role of federal agencies in consulting with Native American tribes on space-related actions that may affect them.

## BEYOND SPACE



# OUTREACH

## NAVAJO NATION CROSS-COUNTRY TOUR

On January 18, the NNWO team began a ten-day road trip across the Nation, visiting significant cultural and historic sites in all corners of the Nation. Over the weekend, the team made stops at Chaco Canyon, the “Newlands” area, and finally to Window Rock for the Navajo Nation Council’s Winter Session.

During the Session, the team met with various Administration leaders. They also stopped at local sites, such as the Navajo Nation Museum.

Later in the week, the team stopped at Canyon de Chelly, Diné College, Glenn Canyon and Horseshoe Bend, the Colorado River, and Lower Antelope Canyon, before driving down Rt. 89 through Coconino National Forest to Phoenix, AZ.



## SUMMER 2024 INTERNSHIP

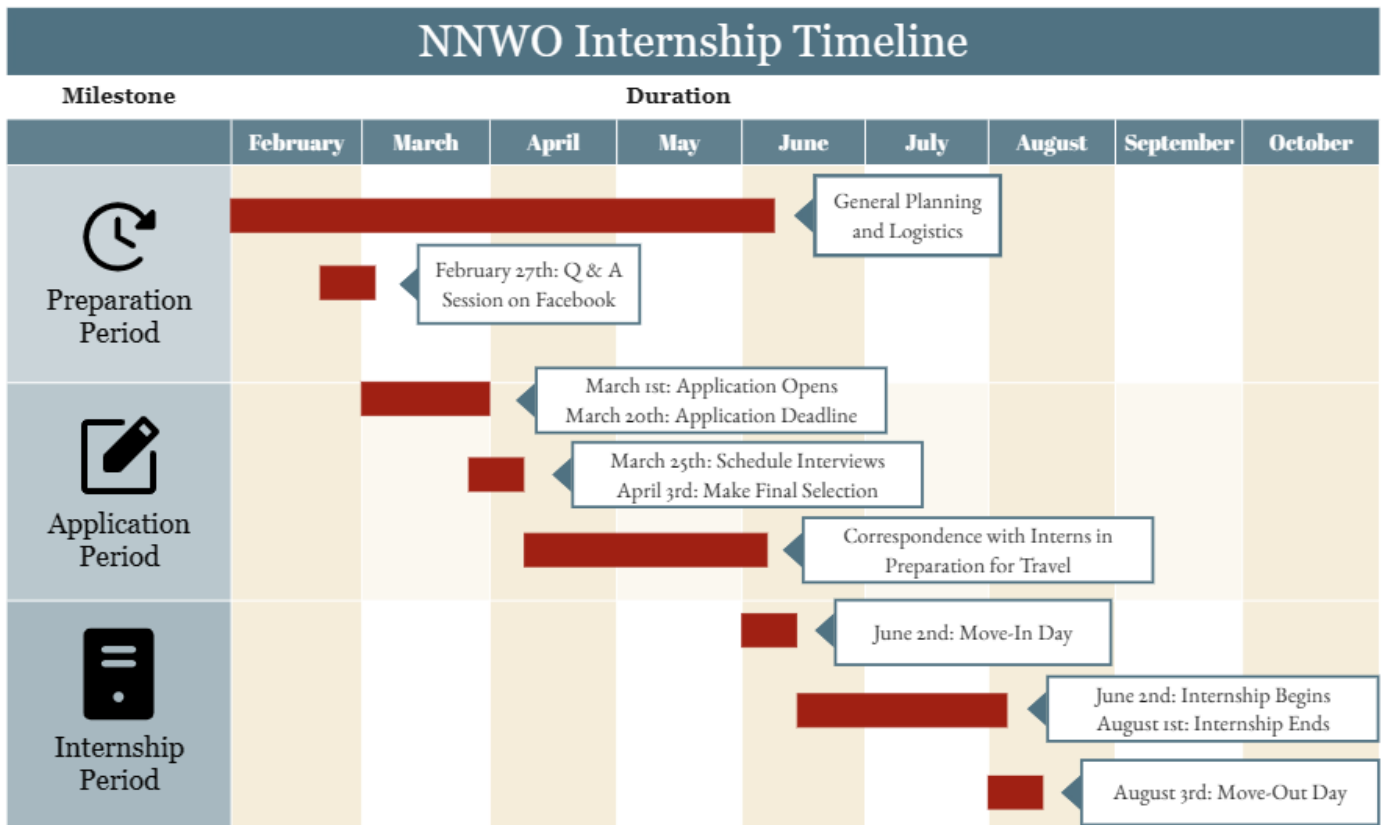
Following the success of last summer's internship program pilot, the Navajo Nation Washington Office eagerly awaits the return of Navajo student interns to Washington, DC in June 2024. The program offers an unparalleled opportunity to gain deep insights into the intricate government-to-government relationship between the Navajo Nation and the United States and prepares students for future leadership roles in governmental affairs.

The incoming cohort will highlight a significant success for NNWO serving as the first internally funded paid internship program in the DC office. The concept of the paid internship developed from the limited involvement seen from Navajo students following the pilot. NNWO discovered that Navajo students encounter a notable financial obstacle that restricts their participation in internship programs due to the financial burden of moving to the DC area. Many Navajo students and their families have constrained financial means, posing a difficulty in covering the expenses linked with such opportunities. NNWO's steadfast commitment to the investment of our Navajo students prompted advocacy efforts that resulted in an opportunity with paid housing, travel, and temporary employment with Navajo preference. The dedication to our Navajo students and our internship program serves as a significant achievement in advocacy and highlights our efforts in outreach to our Navajo communities.

The Navajo Nation Washington Office Internship empowers students to become advocates for positive change in Native American communities. Through hands-on experience, mentorship, and exposure to critical issues, interns emerge with a deepened sense of purpose and a commitment to advancing the interests of the Navajo Nation and promoting the well-being of indigenous peoples across the United States.

However, the internship program was also developed with the intent to prepare the interns for a future career in government and legislative affairs. Recognizing that internships are often the first exposure to working in an office environment, NNWO wanted to provide interns with a genuine glimpse into the dynamics of office culture. The program mirrors authentic challenges and demands encountered within an office environment while providing real-world training experience in the specialized domain of legislative affairs.

The real uniqueness of the internship program stems from the practical elements provided through structured learning objectives and assigned tasks through the duration of the eight-week curriculum. Each task and project delegated to the interns is meticulously selected to reflect responsibilities that Government & Legislative Affairs Associates at NNWO perform daily. The corresponding tasks allow the students the opportunity to research effective methodologies, prepare and present deliverables, and engage with stakeholders representing numerous causes.



The Navajo Nation Washington Office Internship Program for the year 2024 is a comprehensive nine-week program designed to give participants practical experience in the workings of the Navajo Nation's activities in the nation's capital. The program is set to commence on June 2nd and conclude on August 3rd.

The application process for the internship began on March 1, 2024, with a short window for submissions ending on March 20, 2024. As the application deadline has passed, the next phase involving the scheduling of interviews is currently underway. The final selection of three (3) candidates is anticipated to be completed by the beginning of April.

Selected interns are expected to move into their provided dormitory accommodations on June 1, the day before the program begins. This ensures a seamless transition into their roles within the office.

Recognizing the importance of support for interns, this is a paid internship program. The Navajo Nation Washington Office is committed to covering the costs of flights and housing for the interns. Additionally, a temporary salary will be provided, enabling interns to focus on gaining valuable work experience and contributing to the office during their stay.

This initiative reflects the Navajo Nation's investment in the professional development of its members and the strengthening of its representation and advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C.