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OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER
MEDIA CONTACT:
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

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25th Navajo Nation Council urges safeguards and tribal consultation in federal restructuring efforts

Speaker Crystalyne Curley calls for continued federal support and forward funding to protect critical services from disruption.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Tuesday, members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council participated in the U.S. Department of the Interior's Indian Affairs Workforce Efficiency and Productivity tribal consultation held at the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, N.M., where they urged the federal government to uphold meaningful tribal consultation and protect critical services from disruption.

Speaker Curley called for continued federal support of core programs, including the PL 102-477 Workforce Development Program and the completion of the Office of Navajo Hopi Indian Relocation (ONHIR). Additional priorities included forward funding for the Johnson-O'Malley Program, backing for the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, mandatory funding for the BIA 105(l) Lease Program, reforms to the BIA Homesite Lease process, and streamlined NEPA compliance.

The speaker urged support for the Navajo Division of Child and Family Services' 477 Plan, which aims to reduce red tape, improve service coordination, and promote self-sufficiency through job training, education, childcare, and cultural healing.

"We call on DOI to ensure no agency under a 477 plan is eliminated. Doing so would violate the statute and undermine tribal self-determination," she said.

Noting ONHIR's funding will expire at the end of the fiscal year, Speaker Curley stated, "The Nation's position is clear: ONHIR must stay open until its work is complete. We are open to negotiating closure terms that ensure relocatees are served, the remaining 13,000 acres are selected, and obligations are properly transferred."

On education, she called for forward funding of the Johnson-O'Malley Program. "Some districts on the Nation haven't received their 2024-2025 payments, even as the school year ends," she said.

Speaker Curley also pressed Congress to make 105(l) lease payments mandatory to ensure tribes receive consistent facility funding.

"This protects health, education, and safety funds from being displaced and supports long-term planning," she added.

To improve homesite leasing, she urged BIA collaboration on reforms, including better staff training on Trust Asset and Accounting Management System data standards, which would help track and improve processing times.

On NEPA, Speaker Curley cautioned against DOI's compressed timelines and pushed for tribal authority to conduct Environmental Assessments and Impact Statements on their lands.

"Timeliness cannot come at the expense of proper governance," she said. "We need early, consistent consultation—and true co-stewardship, not just advisory roles."

Council Delegate Germaine Simonson raised concerns about the environmental damage from the Trump Administration's Unleashing American Energy Executive Order. She cited Peabody Coal's historic use of over one billion gallons of water annually from the Navajo Aquifer to slurry coal, with little federal accountability for the environmental impact.

"DOI must act with urgency and accountability," Simonson said. "You have the authority to make Executive Orders that drive real change. Use it to protect our resources and our people."

Council Delegate Nathan Notah, who serves on the Law and Order Committee, emphasized the need for mandatory spending for tribal public safety and justice to support law enforcement, facilities, housing, and school resource officers.

The call for meaningful consultation echoed throughout the comments of many tribal leaders who attended the session.

"This consultation felt rushed," Speaker Curley concluded. "Every administration promises meaningful tribal consultation before taking actions that impact Indian Country. It's time to keep that promise."

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