



STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION ADDRESS

PRESIDENT BUU NYGREN

Presented to the

25th Navajo Nation Council

July 21, 2025

I would like to start off by first acknowledging and welcoming the Holy People into the Navajo Nation Council Chambers this morning - nihi Diyin Diné'eh. We come before you today as your children and grandchildren.

Greetings! To my fellow Navajo People, Navajo Nation employees, Vice President Richelle Montoya-Chee, Speaker Crystalyne Curley, Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council, Interim Chief Justice Eleanor Shirley, Division Directors and local officials.

Thank you for the sacred and beautiful horse songs as we rode in this morning. This exemplifies that the Holy People are here with us, as we talk and work as leaders. We are here today among the Holy People to work together to solve issues for our people and our Nation.

I also want to acknowledge my family - my wife and First Lady Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren, and my daughters. Without them and their ongoing support, I would not be your Navajo Nation President. I also want to acknowledge all the young people and community members in the audience and those listening online. E

Over the past century since this Council was created, our leaders had made the journey on horseback each quarter to come to the chambers for Council sessions. Our leaders came in from their

represented communities by horse, talking to community members along the way, praying and ultimately getting here to advocate on behalf of the people they represented. The pieces of legislation and laws that came from them carry sacred blessings and teachings that the Council and I as President of the Navajo Nation honor today. As elected leaders, we are here for our people.

We are more than two years into our terms as elected leaders of the Navajo Nation. A lot has happened in the last quarter. Some of these developments include a growing diversification of our economy, housing access and availability, and our collective emergency response during the Oak Ridge Fire. As I've always said, our values and priorities align in our service to our Navajo Nation and the over 400,000 Navajos, across the United States, and globally.

The decisions we make today impact our future. Over this past third quarter, we have entered the summer season with challenges, but with various solutions to address the struggles of our people. Whether that is inserting the Navajo Nation's point of view on global affairs, the national level, in our state-tribal relationship, or here with Council.

At all levels of governance, this Administration has been heavily involved in the sovereign affairs of the Navajo Nation. I'll begin this report with the Oak Ridge Fire, a wildland fire that forced evacuations of our people and their animals, and the ongoing megadrought that has been occurring since early 2000, which has prompted recent Stage 2 Fire Restrictions across our homelands.

Oak Ridge Fire and Other Fires

Early on, when this fire was reported by Sergeant Erwin Toddy of the Navajo Police Department, the Office of the President mobilized an emergency response immediately with donations and cots in coordination with the Window Rock Unified School District to use the Fighting Scouts Event Center in Fort Defiance as the evacuation shelter.

My media team reported on the fire's movement until the Council's Commission on Emergency Management, my office, the Navajo Department of Emergency Management, and the BIA declared an emergency to ensure all government resources could be deployed to assist our Navajo people.

Along with the Oak Ridge Fire, we had the Bridge Creek Fire on Navajo Mountain, Dragon Bravo Fire on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon and White Sage Fire southwest of Page, Arizona.

The Navajo Mountain fire has been 95% contained where we initially had over 100 personnel deployed as well as water drops happening from Lake Powell. However, the Page and Grand Canyon fires remain active, causing great concern for our Western Navajo communities. Both fires caused immediate evacuations, with the Grand Canyon burning several infrastructure buildings to date. The communities in Western Agency continue to feel and see the effects of the fire as the smoke is causing respiratory issues.

From the start of the Oak Ridge Fire on June 28 to now, we have been hands-on deck as a government, establishing the Oak Ridge Fire Incident Command Post and worked cohesively with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Southwest Complex Incident Management Team Type 2. As of July 16, the Oak Ridge Fire is 100% contained.

As we look forward and prepare for future disasters, I stand ready to sign the Arizona Mutual Aid Agreement. I ask for the Council's support as this Agreement includes a waiver of sovereign immunity but allows us the help we need from the State of Arizona and others if needed.

While we are happy about the containment of the Oak Ridge Fire, there is concern now in the aftermath of the fire with flooding. Just like the Council here, we are briefed daily from the BIA about the ongoing findings of the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team, who will inform us as leaders of the best course of action to mitigate flooding in our impacted communities and to prevent any future natural disaster post-fire.

Of course, there are many of our government stakeholders to thank for this emergency response, including Council delegates Dr. Andy Nez, Brenda Jesus, Vince James, and Arbin Mitchell, whose communities have been most impacted. Thank you to those who volunteered their time and resources assisting those who were evacuated. Lastly, thank you to the firefighters and emergency responders who worked to coordinate emergency response to put the fire out.

Budget Message

Regarding the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, I want to remind the Council that the Budget and Finance Committee (BFC) reduced the Executive Branch's planning allocation by \$28 million compared to what was

expended in FY 2024. To restate, the BFC cut the Executive Branch's base planning amount by \$28 million from the amount spent two years ago, with no adjustments or consideration of rising inflation costs.

My office provided explicit instructions to the entire Executive Branch - all current employees must remain employed. We need to ensure there are no layoffs due to the BFC's reduction in our base planning amount. Additionally, we instructed that any vacant positions intended to be funded must be moved to unmet needs.

Therefore, I am asking the Council to support the unmet needs requests from the Executive Branch. Funding The Executive Branch's unmet needs will avoid another Continuing Resolution (CR), as we are still dealing with the negative impacts of the CR today. Funding the unmet needs will also ensure that there are no layoffs. There are several budgets under consideration where layoffs may occur if unmet needs are not met.

Navajo Nation Economy

Change Labs, SSBCI

We finalized contracts with the U.S. Treasury and received the first tranche of \$26 million of State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) funds. As you know, our Navajo Division of Economic Development (DED) applied for federal funding via the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. Additionally, we finalized a contract with Change Labs, disbursed the initial \$7 million, and will add more funds for disbursement as they successfully launch their programs. This progress is significant, especially as I have heard concerns from the Treasury Department regarding the speed of our rollout.

Our first loans have already started being issued through Change Labs, and we have increased their maximum lending limit to \$5 million. We also approved Change Labs to conduct lending through eight banks, and DED has signed up three banks to participate in the upcoming loan programs. Our goal is to provide 80% of the first tranche by July 2026.

Furthermore, we have established an SSBCI accounting and reporting office at offices in the St. Michaels, recruiting three staff members - including a manager, auditor, and senior accountant - to ensure proper oversight and compliance. These steps will help support the effective implementation and management of the

program, enabling us to meet our objectives and respond to ongoing concerns about the program's pace.

Local Businesses

DED has also made significant strides in supporting Navajo businesses. One of the proudest achievements of the third quarter was the award of the first business loan to a Navajo entrepreneur. This is a milestone because we are creating valuable opportunities for our small business owners.

We also celebrated the grand opening on Friday of the Shiprock E-Hub, a venture of the nonprofit Change Labs, which is designed to open more doors for our artists, food vendors, tradespeople, and tech builders to access support, capital, and community resources.

Another achievement I am proud of is the recent ribbon cutting and grand reopening of the Lukachukai Speedway. It has been nearly two years in the making to get this store open for our community members who live in this region of the Navajo Nation. Our Central Agency Representative dedicated much of her time to ensuring the re-opening of this store. Through the advocacy of my office and the community, we celebrated a July 11 ceremony with Council delegate Carl Slater, Lester Yazzie, and local leadership. It cost about \$1.5 million to reopen this store with new pumps. This store services about 800 to 900 customers.

Our regional communities, such as Chinle, Crownpoint, Kayenta, Window Rock, Shiprock, and Tuba City, remain as our population hubs. Collectively, we are making significant strides in developing its hospitality infrastructure, with several hotel projects in various stages of progress.

Hotels

The Shiprock Hotel, currently under construction, is a major addition to the region's tourism and economic landscape. The project is a collaborative effort between the Navajo Hospitality Enterprise and DED, with an expected completion date set for Spring 2026.

Meanwhile, the Shonto Hotel is entering an exciting new phase. Active collaborations are underway between the Navajo Nation, the Shonto Chapter, and the Navajo Department of Justice is working to resolve the complexities surrounding the business site lease agreement. Negotiations with the hotel management company are

nearing completion, thanks to the dedicated efforts of Attorney General Heather Clah's team and local Chapter leadership.

In addition, DED and the Shonto Chapter are working together to establish a dedicated administrative office through a Memorandum of Understanding. This office will ensure proper governance, transparency, and alignment with Navajo Nation standards—serving as a vital component for the community's vision for sustainable growth and development of the property.

In Crownpoint, the hotel project has reached a critical milestone. The Business Site Lease (BSL) packet is now 98% through DOJ's review process following a resubmission. Once approved, it will proceed to the Approving Committee and the Office of the President and Vice President for final approval. The project, led by Senior Economic Development Specialist Stephany K. Skeets, promises to be transformative for Crownpoint—bringing opportunities for job creation, tourism expansion, and infrastructure enhancement.

While legislation to address the Sihasin Fund shortfall has passed through two Council committees, updated cost estimates necessitate reintroduction of legislation to the committees before it can advance further. The Economic Resource and Business Development Office (ERBDO) continues to work in close coordination with the lessee and various Navajo Nation departments, ensuring transparency and compliance at every step.

Overall, these hotel projects symbolize the Navajo Nation's commitment to economic growth, community development, and creating lasting opportunities for its people.

Honorable Delegates, our Small Business Development Department has cut red tape and delivered results. This quarter alone, 30 Navajo entrepreneurs and businesses secured leases — from dialysis clinics to baby food manufacturing. These projects created 128 jobs, with more to come as we finalize stores in Chilchinbeto and Indian Wells. We're not just approving permits, we're rebuilding our economy from the ground up, one Diné-owned business at a time. This is the Navajo Nation's future — self-sufficiency and innovation that is rooted in our Diné values.

Federal Advocacy

At the federal level, the Navajo Nation Washington Office has been working hard to protect Navajo citizens. On July 4th, U.S. President Donald J. Trump signed into law the reconciliation bill known as the "One Big, Beautiful Bill Act." This legislation brings

sweeping cuts across the federal government. It can be scary, but we fought hard to make sure our Navajo People are protected from some of those cuts.

RECA

Most notably, we celebrated the recent expansion of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) program, a monumental milestone and was decades in the making. This was a decades long fight to help our people who have been exposed to radiation. Our Washington Office worked hard with allies from across the country to get RECA passed.

These RECA amendments from Senator Hawley expand coverage for miners through 1990 and downwinders, including coverage for additional diseases. About 4,000 Navajo workers used to work in over 1,000 uranium mines on the reservation. These mines still haven't been cleaned up. We have over 500 mines that need to be cleaned up. We still have people that live with the effects of the 1979 Church Rock spill, which dumped more than 94 million gallons of radioactive waste into the Rio Puerco River.

Thank you to Maggie Billman, a Navajo from Sawmill Chapter, for her staunch advocacy. She spoke through tears at a recent celebration about what this moment meant for her and her family. Many of her family members—including her father, Howard Billman, Jr., a Navajo Code Talker who died of stomach cancer—have suffered from radiation exposure because of the fallout from atmospheric nuclear tests in Nevada and New Mexico.

I also want to thank the Navajo Nation Washington Office, especially our former Director Justin Ahasteen for his work on ensuring the RECA amendments happened. He raised tens of thousands of dollars to get our affected Navajo People out to Washington, DC. We know that had a huge impact. Justin worked tirelessly to get the amendments passed. Everyone knows that amendments would not have passed if he wasn't in charge. Representative Crane personally called Justin to thank him for his hard work on RECA and to congratulate him after the amendments passed.

SNAP Exemptions

The bill modified the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP") work requirements for able-bodied adults. However, Congress included exemptions for individuals who are Indian, Urban Indian, or a Californian Indian. Therefore, the new SNAP work requirements do not apply to members of the Navajo Nation.

Medicaid Exemptions

The bill also included "community engagement requirements" for able-bodied adults receiving Medicaid benefits. However, Congress included an exemption from this requirement for individuals who are: Indian or Urban Indian, a Californian Indian, or have otherwise been determined eligible as an Indian for Indian Health Service. Therefore, like the new SNAP requirements, the new Medicaid community engagement requirements do not apply to members of the Navajo Nation. But there is still a lot of work that needs to be done.

I am happy that we have protected many Navajo people from some of the harsher elements of the federal cuts. We will remain vigilant as we enter the federal budget season and ensure the cuts are funded through the annual budget process.

1,000 Home Initiative

Housing access and availability remain a top priority of my Administration. To date, we have delivered 170 homes between the Division of Community Development, our Veterans Administration, and the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission to date. Every time I think of housing for our people, we are improving the health outcomes of our people along with economic returns. Under the 1,000 Home Initiative, the goal is plain and simple - get shelter to our relatives.

- Navajo Nation Veterans Administration: There are 25 in construction (in progress) and 13 turnkey ceremonies that have been held to date, with 5 of the 13 occurring in the third quarter.
- Navajo-Hopi Land Commission: The first work order is expected to drop 84 homes. Of the 84, 35 homes were delivered in third quarter.
- Division of Community Development:
 - HIP - Out of 76 homes, 30 total homes have been installed.
 - CHID - Out of 360 homes contracted, 92 total have been installed to date.

As you know with the Council, we are working to bring more homes to the people using the American Rescue Plan Act funds through the Navajo Division of Community Development (DCD). Under its funding mechanism, DCD was allocated approximately \$100 million and has

spent approximately \$47 million to provide long-term housing security.

The third quarter of 2025 for the Navajo Nation ARPA Housing Project was marked by a determined effort to accelerate home deliveries and address critical infrastructure needs.

While significant progress has been made in the production and setting of manufactured homes (Work Order #3) and beginning of deliveries for modular homes (work order #1), the project continues to see challenges, particularly concerning the funding and logistical complexities of utility connections.

Utility Challenges

Because of the way this was legislated by the 24th Navajo Nation Council, we are now dealing with the utility infrastructure challenges. As a result, some programs include utility costs while others did not. In addition, the expenditure plan for CHID homes does not clearly allow ARPA funding to be used for utility connections.

In spite of this, we are actively coordinating to address utilities to homes. We have project managers currently on-site, conducting feasibility assessments and sharing their findings with the utility companies.

Homes requiring new services may take longer to connect compared to those needing reconnections, as new services often require surveys and environmental clearances for rights-of-way. While the exact costs for this scope are still being determined, CHID is exploring all possible funding sources. We ask that recipients of ARPA CHID homes take the lead in obtaining service accounts with your utility providers. I continue to work closely with DCD Director Candice Yazzie and Navajo Tribal Utility Authority to address this issue.

The next quarter will be central for resolving these outstanding issues and demonstrating noticeable progress towards the project's defined goals. I may be asking the Council for funding to ensure utilities are met.

While I know that many of our people live in overcrowded living conditions and have no housing, this plan addresses affordable, accessible, and culturally appropriate housing for the well-being of our Navajo people and their economic stability.

Utilities (Generally)

Light Up Navajo

Every time utility crews from across the U.S. come to the Navajo Nation through Light Up Navajo VI, lives change as many families get electricity for the very first time. Since 2019, Light UP Navajo VI has changed the lives of our people.

NTUA has created a strong partnership with utility companies throughout the U.S. These partnerships have allowed NTUA to work with outside utility companies, who send their crews to Navajo and pay for their crew's travel and labor while working on Navajo. NTUA, meanwhile, covers the materials and equipment. This is how our families have benefited.

Right now, about 10,000 Navajo families still lack power. Our goal is to bring more utility companies into this effort—to expand access, build partnerships, and unite city and cooperative utilities working together.

Together with utility companies across the U.S., we're powering hope and building a better future for Navajo families. Thank you to all for supporting this vital work.

Navajo Veterans

I want to reaffirm that supporting our veterans is a top priority for my office and the Nygren Administration. Understanding how vital our veterans are to our freedoms in partnership with the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, we are mobilizing resources and support that they deserve. On July 7, I invited all five Agency Veteran Organizations to my office. I spent over five hours with them and I listened to their concerns.

Across Fort Defiance, Central, Western, Eastern, and Northern Agencies, the focus with our veterans has been on transparency, strategic planning, and advocacy. We have since developed five-year renovation plans, expanding contractor pools for veterans' homes, and acquiring land for veteran housing in regions such as Utah.

In addition, housing challenges, funding stagnation, and incomplete projects like the Oak Spring Veterans Park remain priorities among our veterans. The Veterans are seeking an increase in the set aside that funds their Trust Fund. I look forward to receiving legislation from the Navajo Nation Council.

Our goal remains clear: to ensure every veteran receives the care and respect they have earned through their service. Supporting our veterans is not just a priority – it's a moral obligation. Together, we will continue working to honor their sacrifice with responsive, transparent systems that serve our community's heroes.

Roads

With nation-building comes basic infrastructure like better roads. It is so easy to think that a road can be built by bulldozing dirt and laying pavement. And that is simply not true because it requires federal, state and tribal funding sources and the professional engineering services to design roads and then the contract being awarded to various contractors for the build. Even so, roads remain a top priority for the Nygren Administration.

Director Tom Platero has worked hard over the last year to build capacity with his team at the Navajo Department of Transportation (NDOT). He has been working hard to get the right management team in place to ensure our goals become a reality. We are starting to see returns on Director Platero's hard work to build the right team at NDOT.

As a result of this capacity-building, many road projects are happening across the Navajo Nation. Some are groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings, including:

- \$14.6 million approved to improve 2.78 miles of N5001 between Toadlena and Two Grey Hills
- \$377,000 contract with DJOE Construction to improve two miles of Burnt Corn Road in Iyanbito, N.M.
- \$30 million contract to improve 7.2 miles of Navajo Route 12 near Wheatfields Lake
- Completion of the \$21.2 million Navajo Route 35 in Sweetwater, Ariz., which will make commutes shorter, efficient and safer for our people.

I remind the Council and our Navajo People to remain patient because each time pavement or roads improve, it reduces our 14,000-mile road inventory.

Chief Justice

I signed a joint letter on Thursday, July 3, with 25th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley and Law and Order Committee Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton, recognizing Associate

Justice Eleanor Shirley as the Interim Chief Justice of the Navajo Nation.

We thank former Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne for her service and the time she spent as a Probationary Chief Justice for the Navajo Nation. Once the position is advertised, we encourage all eligible and qualified individuals to apply. A stable judiciary is the foundation of justice, accountability, and good governance for our people. These roles require the highest levels of integrity, fairness, and commitment to Diné values and laws.

Message On Confirming Division Directors

I urge you to adopt all legislation confirming any director that is currently in your queue for confirmation. A vote for them is a step toward working together.

For those directors beginning the process, my call to action to this legislative body - the sole body authorized to enact legislation - is to draft and introduce legislation to confirm their appointment. Let us focus our efforts on roads, aging infrastructure, and a lack of basic services like electricity and clean water.

We need to support these Navajo professionals who are dedicating themselves to improving the quality of life for our people, we need to support them and work to confirm them.

Cooling Centers at the Chapter Houses, Senior Centers

Through this ongoing drought comes extreme heat. With this Council, we need to pass emergency legislation to mobilize resources to keep our people cool during this hot summer. One solution is to keep our chapter houses and senior center as public cooling centers, which is a common practice in urban settings.

This summer, I do not want to lose any of our people to heat exhaustion. I believe one way to achieve this is to ask the Commission of Emergency Management to act on this resolution to make this a reality. I request that the 25th Navajo Nation Council allocate funds to the Navajo Department of Health for utilities, coolers, and the necessary equipment to provide a space for elders to cool down.

There are currently 85 senior centers across the Nation, with 72 in operation which would need approximately \$1.6 million for the next three months to keep them open.

Ensuring Economic Integrity: Call for Review of Solar Tax Proposal

I respectfully ask this body to table the current legislation and hold a dedicated work session on July 30, 2025. This session would include participation from the Department of Justice, the United States Department of Commerce, and the Navajo Nation Tax Commission. Erika Pirotte from DOJ has already provided a save-the-date for this meeting to ensure proper coordination.

I request this because we want to ensure we are developing a tax that has the review of as many entities as possible. Let us take the time to do this right – for our Navajo people, our economy, and our future.

Asks of the Navajo Nation Council

I will reiterate my past asks to the 25th Navajo Nation Council: Education is essential for our future.

- After the recent fire that destroyed buildings on our campus, we must ensure that Diné College receive financial assistance to rebuild and continue serving our community and students.
- We also need to advance our procurement amendments, with a deadline set for November 2024, to stay on schedule for our development goals.
- With projected revenue of \$285 million, along with tariffs, we're experiencing rising costs, which necessitate increased budgets for FY2026.
- Lastly, we remain committed to our broadband plan. The Navajo Nation Broadband Office requires a \$77.8 million allocation from the Council for Phase I, which will see the construction of 36 towers across the Navajo Nation to deploy 5G connectivity.

Regarding natural disaster response, a small disaster costs at least \$3 million, according to our Navajo Department of Emergency Management (NDEM). I ask that this Council fully fund DEM, which needs a \$5 million budget, which will fund 20 full-time employees. Funding DEM will allow them to be functional and to allow for a permanent incident command post to respond to our natural disasters.

Closing/Conclusion

I look forward to continuing to work with the 25th Navajo Nation Council to improve the lives of our people. I thank the People for

allowing me to serve as your President. God bless the Navajo people. And God bless our Great Navajo Nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. V. Nye". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "F" and a long, horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.