



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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### **Navajo Nation Council opposes proposed flat funding to Indian Affairs programs at Tribal Interior Budget Council**



**Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton called upon federal leaders to fully fund Indian Affairs budgets.**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – At the August 4–7 quarterly meeting of the Tribal Interior Budget Council (TIBC) in Tulsa, Okla., members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council joined other tribal leaders in opposing proposed flat funding and unfunded priorities in Indian Affairs budgets for the third consecutive year.

On Aug. 5, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Scott Davis and Bureau of Indian Affairs Director Bryan Mercier reported to TIBC that the 2026 House and Senate marks fund Indian Affairs programs at or above 2024 and 2025 levels. However, President Donald Trump's 2026 budget request proposes \$2.7 billion—\$1.2 billion less than the \$3.9 billion provided under the 2025 Continuing Resolution.

Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton, co-chair of TIBC's Public Safety & Justice Subcommittee, addressed the long-standing underfunding of Indian Country priorities. She reminded federal leaders of their responsibility to enhance the quality of life for Native Americans and Alaska Natives by fulfilling trust obligations to fully fund Indian Affairs budgets.

"Our budget has never been enough. Your job is to fight for tribes. Our relatives are beaten down by life and called resilient as they struggle to maintain their livelihood," Charles-Newton said. "What I want to hear from our federal partners is not that you understand our struggles, but what you are going to do about them."

Building on her remarks, Charles-Newton also addressed the \$84 million reduction to tribal public safety programs in President Trump's 2026 request. She noted that she and other members of the Law and Order Committee consistently advocate on Capitol Hill for increased and mandatory funding for tribal Public Safety and Justice (PS&J) budgets to strengthen crime response efforts.

According to the Tribal Law and Order Act, the national average should be 2.8 officers for every 1,000 residents. On the Navajo Nation, there is only one officer for every 917 members.

"We advocate for mandatory funding specifically for the Office of Justice Services and the 197 tribes that receive law enforcement and criminal investigation funds because of the manpower shortages we face," Chair Charles-Newton said.

The Council also heard reports on education funding. Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Director Tony Dearman and Deputy Bureau Director Sharon Pinto briefed TIBC on the budget status of the Operation of Indian Education Programs (OIEP), noting that funding has remained flat since Fiscal Year 2023 at approximately \$1.1 billion.

Dearman emphasized that the BIE serves more than 400,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students nationwide through a comprehensive system of direct services and funding programs spanning early childhood through postsecondary education. Despite this reach, per-pupil funding stands at \$7,500—far below the national average of \$25,000.

"As tribal leaders, it's our responsibility to make sure our numbers increase," Dearman said. "What we're seeing in terms of funding is inequity."

In his staffing update, Dearman reported that since January 20, 2025, the BIE has lost 150 employees under the Deferred Resignation Program. The agency remains under a hiring freeze, with further cuts and reductions in force expected.

Although President Trump's FY2026 request maintains flat funding, the House Interior Bill proposes a \$104 million increase for BIE OIEP and a \$61 million increase for education construction compared to FY2025 appropriations.

In transportation updates, BIA Division of Transportation Chief LeRoy Gishi reported that the Tribal Transportation Program (TTP) has received flat funding since FY2024; however, in FY2025, the BIA DOT received notice of an additional \$150 million for the program.

Council Delegate Otto Tso, co-chair of TIBC's Transportation Subcommittee, raised concerns about the formula used to allocate TTP funds among the 574 federally recognized tribes.

"We need to educate Congress on the realities of tribal transportation needs so they understand that failing to fund transportation at the maximum threshold means underfunding critical infrastructure that supports all BIA-funded programs," Tso said. "We want the federal government to live up to their federal obligation in funding Indian Country, to meet their needs."

Tso reiterated that the formula used to determine TTP allocations is detrimental to the road funding tribes receive. "These formulas created by Congress are not helping us," he said.

Tribal leaders also expressed concern over not receiving the FY2026 Green Book, which annually guides their budgeting process.

In closing, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Scott Davis acknowledged the concerns raised by tribal leaders and reaffirmed his commitment to addressing them.

“Thank you for your comments and strong voices—they are important reminders of our role as your trustee,” Davis said. “I can assure you our staff is working hard every day for Indian Country. These issues affect me and my family as well, and we know we’re not in a good place with the Interior right now. But please know we are fighting for you.”

Council Delegates Curtis Yanito, Nathan Notah and Germaine Simonson also attended TIBC’s quarterly meeting.

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