



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Januray 27, 2026

25th Navajo Nation Council honors military service, cultural legacy, and youth leadership



The 25th Navajo Nation Council recognized master weaver Irene Hardy Clark for her lifetime of artistic excellence.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Tuesday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council began the second day of the 2026 Winter Session by highlighting a series of recognitions that honored military service, cultural preservation, and youth achievement.

Council Delegate Curtis Yanito recognized U.S. Space Force Specialist Four Alexis Michele Begay for her historic service as the first Navajo citizen and first Navajo woman to serve in the United States Space Force (USSF).

"It's important that we recognize these individuals who are doing a superb job and leading the way in critical and dynamic career fields like SP4 Begay has done," Yanito said.

During the recognition ceremony, Vice President Richelle Montoya and Delegate Yanito signed a Navajo Nation proclamation that recognized Begay's academic achievements, military training, and current service with the High Frontier Honor Guard at Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado.

Speaker Crystalyne Curley emphasized the broader significance of the recognition for Navajo youth and future leadership.

"This young lady has opened a door for the Navajo Nation, young women, and all aspiring servicemembers. She is a pillar of our future leadership, to say that no matter where I come from, I'm capable of anything," said Speaker Curley.

Begay reflected on her path into the U.S. Space Force and the responsibility of representing the Navajo Nation in a new frontier of service.

"It has been an honor being part of the journey and impacting the different changes that are being created," Begay said. "I'm proud to be the first Navajo, and I hope I can inspire more to join."

"These are values we want for our students. Exposure to education at an early age, introduction to other lifestyles and opportunities, connections with diversity, and a foundation in family," said Yanito.

Begay was joined by her family, who expressed gratitude for the recognition.

Council Delegate Rickie Nez recognized master weaver Irene Hardy Clark for her lifetime of artistic excellence and cultural contribution to traditional Crystal-style Navajo weaving. Delegate Nez led the recognition, highlighting her influence on Navajo art and the preservation of traditional knowledge.

Irene's son, Dr. Ferlin Clark, spoke to her resilient nature.

"She taught us discipline and how to be resilient. She never felt sorry for herself. She paid attention to details, which ultimately would show up in her work," he said.

Delegate Nez presented Clark with a Certificate of Recognition that honored her mastery, innovation, and dedication to Navajo weaving traditions. He noted that Clark's work has gained international recognition and a legacy within the Navajo Nation.

The session concluded with recognition of youth talent, honoring Shiprock ventriloquist Natalia Fawn Begay, whose performances incorporate comedy and the Navajo language. Delegate Nez encouraged continued support for young Navajo artists and leaders.

"Here is a young lady from the great Navajo Nation that we should all be very proud of. We should encourage our young people to pursue whatever it is that they would like to do in life," Delegate Nez said.

Begay thanked the Council and her family for their support.

"I would like to thank my parents, as they have always been there with me, encouraging me," she said. "Thank you, everyone, for supporting me."

The 2026 Winter Session recognition ceremony reflected the Navajo Nation Council's continued emphasis on honoring service, safeguarding cultural knowledge, and recognizing youth achievement that contributes to the strength and future of the Navajo Nation.