



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 7, 2023

CONTACT: Donovan Quintero, Communications Director

Email: donovan.quintero@navajo-nsn.gov

Cell: 928-810-9179

Statement by Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren on Executive Protection Services program

As we look ahead to the coming new year, I want to take time to address questions regarding the Executive Protection Services program, changes to the Navajo Nation plan of operation relating to EPS, and the sudden focus on the hiring of a Navajo Nation employee within EPS. Here is the truth:

- No unlawful conflict of interest exists in the hiring of that employee.
- No Navajo Nation laws have been broken in the hiring of that employee.
- No babysitting services were provided, only protective services.

The Office of the President upholds transparency and accountability as fundamental values. We strive to ensure good governance and to maintain public trust.

There have been insinuations that an agent with no relevant experience was hired for Executive Protection Services. It has come to our attention that people are being misinformed and misled regarding the EPS program in the Office of the President and Vice President.

While qualifications of individual regular employees are subject to confidentiality rules, we believe in transparency, and therefore, we are releasing the following information with the employee's permission:

The Navajo Nation employee in question has over five years' experience in law enforcement, more than 13 years' experience as a professional driver with a clean record, and has undergone over 120 hours of Executive Protection training.

The employee submitted their employment application to be evaluated and assessed through the same process as all regular and temporary Navajo Nation applicants.

Additionally, the employee is fluent in Navajo, a vital skill for interacting with Navajo constituents unaided.

With these combined skills, and the inherent trust of the First Family, this employee is uniquely qualified to serve in the capacity of EPS agent where others would be deficient.

The EPS program was first established to provide executive-level protection and transportation for the then-Navajo Tribal chairman, the vice chairman, and their immediate families. Today, the EPS program remains an essential component of the Office of the President and Vice President, ensuring the safety of the president, vice president, and their immediate family members during their travels and public engagements on behalf of the Navajo people.

As a young, growing family constantly in the public eye, we face continuous scrutiny due to the nature of our positions. Therefore, it is crucial to have someone whose trustworthiness is impeccable, exemplary, and beyond reproach to protect us.

Though she takes no salary, the First Lady serves our communities through her initiatives. When it comes to my wife, former Arizona state representative, and First Lady Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren, there is a deep love for lifting up our Navajo people and being among our communities.

Apart from driving, the First Lady's assigned personnel is responsible for conducting security sweeps in the

early mornings and late evenings, especially when we return home late at night. It takes trained personnel we can trust entirely for transportation, even on journeys lasting from 30 minutes to eight hours.

The position of protecting the First Lady and our family requires unwavering trust. As President, First Lady, and young parents, trust was the primary principle guiding our shared position on each other's safety.

I allow no compromises when it comes to the individual responsible for protecting the First Lady. They must provide undaunted security not only during travel but also within the Presidential home in Window Rock and our personal residence.

I want to clarify that the misinformation I refer to was not confirmed, validated, or verified through a discussion with me. Firstly, it has been inaccurately stated that the Administration changed Navajo Nation law to hire one employee. In reality, the law was not changed to accommodate a single individual, as alleged, but was in fact designed to reduce fatigue and turnover under the demands of the job. Secondly, the decision to hire this employee was carefully thought out and vetted. The employee is directly supervised by the EPS program supervisor and not the Office of the President and Vice President.

Our intention has always been to hire trusted and qualified EPS agents to provide these services, rather than depleting the numbers of police officers in the field.

We understand the immense pressures faced by the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety in hiring, training, and stationing police officers throughout the Navajo Nation. Every police officer in the field is indispensable and, as any Navajo person can attest to, response times are not ideal due ultimately to the chronic shortage of certified officers.

The law was changed to allow the hiring of police officers or other qualified individuals as EPS agents. Consequently, four EPS agents, not just one, were hired under the new law. These agents were specifically trained to ensure that Navajo Nation police officers can focus on protecting the Navajo people.

Furthermore, the EPS agent who has faced unnecessary and inappropriate public scrutiny and humiliation has submitted his resignation. We acknowledge the impact this situation has had on him and appreciate his service.

The rhetoric launched against this Navajo Nation employee is a classic example of the many reasons we lose some of our best and brightest to less hostile off-reservation public safety agencies.

Our Administration remains committed to transparency, communication, and accountability.

In light of the unsubstantiated and misinformed assertions, and to maintain public trust and the highest ethical standards, we have decided to make changes within the Executive Protection Service program and its security protocols. As a result, under my Administration all current EPS agents who are not certified police officers will be transitioned out of EPS to address any public concerns.

Four certified police officers will be reassigned from regular duty to replace the outgoing Executive Protection Service agents. This change aims to enhance the protection and safety of the President, Vice President, and their immediate family members.

We hope it will also begin restoring the public faith in their government that was lost through the undignified vilification of our valued regular-status Navajo Nation employees.

I trust that this statement has addressed the questions raised by the Navajo people and the honorable members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council.

In thinking for the future, I hope someday soon I will see a transformational legislation delivered to my desk that sets our Executive Protection Service program on the path to growth to extend EPS agents to our Supreme Court Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne and our Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley.

My office will always work towards solutions and action, not division and disharmony.

In conclusion, no Navajo Nation laws were broken, and no conflict of interest existed. We remain committed to upholding transparency, accountability, and public trust.

###