



The Navajo Nation
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Navajo President Buu Nygren, Navajo Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley urge protection from desecration of moon, celestial sites to NASA

WASHINGTON – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren and Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley explained to NASA today how culturally significant the moon is to Navajo and other Indigenous people.

Today's meeting between the Navajo Nation and NASA Administrator Bill Nelson represents a significant step toward acknowledging and respecting Native American perspectives within United States space policy.

The President and Speaker emphasized that while space exploration is a noble endeavor, it should not come at the expense of desecrating celestial sites sacred to Navajos and other tribes.

The hour meeting at National Aeronautics and Space Administration headquarters here reiterated that neither the Navajo Nation nor the Navajo people are against space missions. Despite that, President Nygren said, leaving human remains on the moon conflicts with the Navajo perspective of what is sacred and what should remain undisturbed.

"We appreciate what NASA does to advance our exploration in space," President Nygren said. "The Navajo Nation doesn't oppose exploration. What we do oppose is federal funds being used to support burial activities that impact Native cultures."



Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren and Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley discuss tribal consultation and NASA space policy with NASA Administrator Bill Nelson in Washington on Thursday.

NASA indicated a willingness to review its policies to protect sacred sites. A firm commitment awaits a legal review.



On Dec. 21, 2023, President Nygren wrote to Administrator Nelson and Secretary of Transportation Peter Buttigieg to express his “deep concern and profound disappointment regarding a matter of utmost importance to our community.”

He raised Navajo concerns about the Jan. 8, 2024, launch of the Vulcan Centaur that carried Astrobotic Technology’s Peregrine Mission One moon lander with payloads from two companies that specialize in space burials. That launch ultimately failed.

The President stated that the Navajo Nation first objected to human remains being taken to the moon when it learned in the late 1990s that a mission carried the remains of the late astrogeologist Eugene Shoemaker.

NASA apologized and agreed to consultation with the Navajo Nation before authorizing further missions to the moon with human remains.

It neglected to do so with its last mission that launched one month ago today.

“We ask only that NASA refine its policies and contracts to reflect the federal government’s commitment to preserve sacred sites and to allow tribes to be a part of the process in this era of space exploration,” President Nygren said.

President Nygren’s and Speaker Curley’s meeting with NASA is considered a step to bridge NASA’s space goals with the Navajo people’s sacred traditions. The President proposed that federal funds be explicitly allocated to space exploration activities with a respectful acknowledgment of the moon’s sanctity in accordance with Navajo beliefs.

Administrator Nelson is a former three-term U.S. Senator. He is the 14th NASA administrator and took office in 2021. According to NASA, during his 18 years as a senator, he contributed to nearly every piece of space and science law, including the landmark NASA Authorization Act of 2010.

In 1986, he trained and flew with the crew of the Space Shuttle Columbia, the 24th flight of the space shuttle, according to NASA. The mission orbited Earth 98 times over six days.

While aboard, Administrator Nelson conducted 12 medical experiments, the first American treadmill stress test in space and a cancer research experiment sponsored by university researchers.

In Congress, he was considered the leader on the space program, a strong advocate to combat climate change, and a proponent for career training and educational programs in science and technology. His Senate committee assignments included national security, defense, intelligence, foreign policy, finance, commerce, trade and health care.

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The moon, known as *Ooljéé'* or *T'éeé Honaa'éei*, is not merely a celestial body but a deity deeply rooted in Navajo creation stories and ceremonies, she said.

NASA's earlier commitment to consult with the Navajo Nation is reflected in federal policies such as the November 2000 Executive Order 13175. That order ensured consultation and coordination with tribes and reiterated fundamental principles in tribal policy that the United States would maintain its unique relationship with tribes as dependent nations.

Tribes' government-to-government relationship with the federal government acknowledges tribal self-government, sovereignty, and self-determination.

On Feb. 1, 2021, President Biden issued the first of three memoranda to reaffirm his administration's commitment to tribal nations. It directed executive departments and agencies to reinvigorate consultation with Indian tribes.

On Dec. 6, 2023, President Biden signed an executive order in support of tribes to make it easier for Indigenous people to access federal funding.

human remains to the moon without adequate consultation, President Nygren held a tele-conference meeting with the White House.



Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley explains to NASA Administrator Bill Nelson the cultural significance of the moon to Navajos. She explained its importance in traditional ceremonies, songs, star constellations and broader Navajo cosmology.

The meeting highlighted the urgency for genuine dialogue, particularly within the Space Council's framework and regarding celestial sites sacred to tribes and Indigenous people.

Separately during the discussion, President Nygren emphasized the importance of creating collaboration between NASA and the Navajo Nation to increase the participation of Native American students in STEM fields.

He proposed NASA-sponsored events on Navajo land to spark interest in space sciences among Navajo youth. The events would engage young people in STEM-related fields to inspire the next generation of Navajo and Indigenous scientists, engineers and astronauts.

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