



The Navajo Nation  
Yideeskáądi Nitsáhákees

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## Navajo President Buu Nygren presents State of Navajo Nation Address

*Calls for hourly wage increase for government, businesses on reservation*

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren told the Navajo Nation Council that reopening of the tribal government in the first months of his presidency resulted in a rebound of business across the reservation and \$142 million in tribal taxes.

“The (pandemic) shutdown not only impacted the livelihood of our business owners but stopped our people from getting goods and services,” he said in his quarterly State of the Navajo Nation address to the council on Monday. “Our businesses are starting to see a positive economic impact and have rebounded.”

Tribal taxes collected in 2023 were \$35.2 million above projected tax income for the year, he said.

“In our last quarter, we collected nearly \$30 million,” he said. “Our non-retail sales tax brought in the largest segment at \$17.2 million in taxes collected.”



*Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren was pleased with his reception at the winter session of the Navajo Nation Council. He bid best wishes to former Speaker Seth Damon, behind him, as he departs Friday to his new job as New Mexico Deputy Secretary of Indian Affairs and is greet by Council Delegate Rickie Nez.*

As he began his 20-minute address, he congratulated former Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon on his selection as New Mexico Deputy Secretary of Indian Affairs.

In an emotional moment as Speaker Damon chaired the session on his last day as a council delegate, he choked up to say the reality of

leaving just hit him as he turned in the laptop he had used for the last eight years.

The President took a moment to wish a happy 106<sup>th</sup> birthday to Navajo Code Talker John Kinsel, Sr., of Lukachukai, one of the last three living Code Talkers.



competitive if we want to see real progress for our Nation. It's not just government. It's all businesses and all organizations across the Navajo Nation. All of us know it's tough to live here on Navajo so let's make it easier for them."

He urged the council to pass a modern minimum wage by the end of 2024.

President Nygren said that as he was speaking, a decades-old wish of Navajo veterans was coming true in Chinle. On Monday, the Northern Arizona Veterans Administration Health Care System held a grand opening to bring federal VA medical services to the Navajo Nation.

*Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren presents his State of the Navajo Nation address on Monday, the first day of the winter session.*

President Nygren said one of the more important actions of all three branches of Navajo government was the adoption of the \$258 million FY 2024 comprehensive budget last September.

Even though the budget contained a 4% general wage adjustment and step increases for tribal employees, the President said that didn't go far enough.

"Within our own government, our effective minimum wage is only \$7.58 per hour," he said. "How does a single parent provide for children, pay for rent and gas to get to work on this wage?"

Arizona raised its minimum wage to \$14.35 per hour on January 1, he said. Flagstaff raised its minimum wage to \$17.40 on the same day.

"That's 2.3 times our minimum wage," President Nygren said. "We must become

With the ribbon cutting of a VA clinic within the Chinle Comprehensive Healthcare Facility, the Navajo Nation became the first tribe in the country to open a VA clinic. Navajo veterans won't be required to drive to either Albuquerque or Phoenix to receive their VA health benefit.

Next, President Nygren said he would ask Congress to truly meet the medical needs of thousands of Navajo veterans by building, equipping and staffing a Veterans Administration medical center on the Navajo Nation.





**Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren joins Miss Navajo Nation Amy Reeves-Begaye, Navajo Nation Supreme Court Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne, Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley and Navajo Arts & Crafts Enterprise CEO JT Willie who presented a Pendleton robe to departing former Speaker Seth Damon.**

“We need our own VA medical center here on Navajo,” he said.

Regarding the Navajo Nation’s \$2 billion in ARPA funding, President Nygren said 57% of the funds have been obligated to be spent on construction, digital connectivity, bathroom additions in the most rural communities, and other projects, even improved cell phone service.

“We are now upgrading 40 towers to increase 4G capacity on Navajo,” he said. “This will benefit 26,554 cell phone users and 10,752 homes over 6,444 square miles. Some communities will gain access to 5G through this initiative by 2024.

Last year the Nation opened its first Sober Living Center in Chinle.

The President said this will provide temporary housing for eight clients and their families and assist them to adopt a sober way of life.

The program will help people with addictions transition back to work, school, job readiness and find permanent housing.

The Shiprock Navajo Regional Behavioral Health Center Youth Residential Treatment Center will reopen this month to provide

behavioral health services to Navajo youth, he said.

In a final request to the council that was contained in his written report, the President asked Navajo Nation Speaker Crystalyne Curley and Navajo Nation Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne to join him in discussions to correct, modernize and improve the Navajo Nation criminal justice system that one newspaper headline recently described as “broken.”

Among a long list of issues, police officers are frustrated that offenders cannot be held or prosecuted because of caseload backlogs in tribal courts, and citizens are frustrated that they can’t access the legal system and services they need.

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