

Nez-Lizer welcome U.S. Attorneys to the Navajo Nation

Written by Staff Reports

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer were joined by Navajo Nation Attorney General Doreen N. McPaul, Acting Deputy Attorney General Kimberly Dutcher, and Acting Chief Prosecutor Jennifer Henry for a momentous occasion to meet with U.S. Attorneys from the states of Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico Aug. 26.

Nez and Lizer welcomed U.S. Attorney John W. Huber who serves the District of Utah; Michael G. Bailey who serves the District of Arizona; and John C. Anderson, who serves the District of New Mexico to the Office of the President and Vice President, to discuss ways to improve the coordination of tribal and federal investigations, detainer protocols, evidence sharing, reintegration of federal inmates, violence against women prevention, and the death penalty.

In addition, Nez spoke about the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act and the importance of increasing communication and data collecting related to violent acts committed upon Navajo women and children, including offenses committed by non-Navajos.

“We need to have a deeper discussion about how the Navajo Nation and your offices can do to

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protect Navajo women and children and to allow our system to prosecute and hold offenders accountable for their violent acts,” Nez said.

Nez and Navajo Nation Acting Chief Prosecutor Jennifer Henry spoke in support of improving response time in regards to the gathering of evidence and the process to decide whether or not to prosecute alleged offenders in the federal or tribal judicial systems.

They noted that the federal decision to either prosecute or decline to prosecute sometimes takes a very long time. This extended period can leave the Navajo Nation in a position to miss its opportunity to prosecute. On the other hand, premature prosecution by the Navajo Nation may jeopardize a federal prosecution.

Nez and Lizer offered their support for returning Navajo people in federal custody to the Navajo Nation to serve the remainder of their sentences after completing the majority of their term elsewhere.

“After a Navajo person has served a major portion of a sentence, the Navajo Nation should have an option to request that the inmate complete the remaining portion of the sentence in a Navajo Nation detention facility depending on the availability of space and resources,” Nez said. “This would help reintegrate the person with family and community, and reconnect with cultural values. In addition to those concerns, Navajo families have to travel long distances and carry the financial burden of travel expenses to visit family members that are in custody in federal facilities across the country.”

In regards to the federal death penalty, Nez reminded the U.S. Attorneys that the Navajo Nation has a long history of opposing the application of the death penalty on members of the Navajo Nation, which is reflected in statements from past leaders of the Navajo Nation.

Henry also noted the large volume of cases that the Nation’s 13 prosecutors are required to review each year in coordination with the U.S. Attorneys and others. She also thanked their offices for their open line of communication and for working together with the Nation despite limited resources.

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The Navajo Nation Office of the Prosecutor is coordinating with the Arizona U.S. Attorney's Office to place a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Office of the Prosecutor, who would be a Navajo prosecutor with special designation to assist in the prosecution of federal offenses committed on the Navajo Nation.

Nez and Lizer thanked the U.S. Attorneys for visiting the Navajo Nation and welcomed them to meet again to further discuss and strategize on the issues discussed during the Aug. 26 meeting.