

‘Kiki’ Saavedra continues to help others even after death

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 14 February 2020 08:07



H. B. 225 to help elders named for the state representative

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Vice President Myron Lizer, and Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty commend the New Mexico House Health and Human Services Committee for supporting House Bill 225, which aims to allocate \$25 million to establish The Kiki Saavedra Senior Dignity Fund to support services administered by the New Mexico Department of Aging and Long Term Services for the benefit of elderly people.

The committee supported the measure by a 6 - 0 vote on Feb. 3. The bill now moves to the House Appropriations and Finance Committee. During the hearing, a letter from Nez and Lizer was delivered to the committee requesting member support. The bill is named after the late former State Rep. Henry “Kiki” Saavedra who died of Alzheimer’s disease in January 2019.

“The trust fund for elderly people is greatly needed to better address high priority needs for senior citizens and those with disabilities throughout the state, and particularly on the Navajo Nation, where we have many elders who live in remote areas that are in need of more assistance,” Nez said, as he acknowledged some of the recent successes of the Navajo Department of Aging and Long Term Care Services, including the acquisition of new transportation vans and food delivery vehicles for senior centers, and the completion of a master lease for an elderly group home in the community of Birdsprings, Ariz.

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“The Nez-Lizer Administration is making positive changes for our elderly Navajo people. Having a state trust fund will create more opportunities for partnerships to provide more services in our communities,” he added. Nez has also recommended that the Nation create an elder and youth office to combine and coordinate efforts to better bridge the generational teachings for Navajo youth and elders.

In her State of the State Address Jan. 21, N. M. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham spoke in support of establishing the trust fund, which is also included in the Governor’s recommended budget to state legislators.

“We appreciate the Governor’s support and the sponsors of the bill for pushing this measure forward to help those who are in great need in the state of N. M. and the Navajo Nation. President Nez and I will continue to advocate and lobby for the passage of House Bill 225 throughout the legislative session,” Lizer stated.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty, a longtime advocate for Navajo elders, also spoke in support of establishing the elderly trust fund. She represents several rural communities as a member of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, including Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, and Tsé ałnáoz’t’l’í.

“The Navajo Nation recognizes that our elders are the foundation of our communities. Our elders’ teachings, values, and love, contribute to the strengthening of our families and play(s) a vital role in restoring kinship. Our rural communities require more attention as we face challenges caused by progressive health issues such as Alzheimer’s disease that destroys memory and other important mental functions,” Crotty said.

The Kiki Saavedra Senior Dignity Fund would provide services related to transportation, food benefits, physical and behavioral health, case management and caregiving. The bill also calls for increased access for seniors and adults with disabilities, including veterans, to specialty vehicles and to specialty physical and behavioral health care not always provided in rural areas, assistance with appointments and meals in underserved areas of the state, and care coordination through community health workers.

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