

Diné College mourns passing of former Regent Nelson BeGaye

Written by gallupsun
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TSAILE, Ariz. – Nelson BeGaye, a former Diné College Board of Regent who served from 2015 to 2019 and tirelessly pressed for Navajo culture in the school's leadership and inside the classrooms, passed away April 15 at the age of 69.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer issued a proclamation April 17 ordering all flags on the Navajo Nation to be flown at half-staff in honor of the former longtime Navajo Nation Council member.

Board President Greg Bigman, who served alongside BeGaye on the Board said he tremendously advocated for Navajo language and culture beyond academic programs but also on the board where he requested the college ceremonial basket be brought into the Board of Regents meetings to help guide the decision-making. "He was the first board member who asked the basket to be brought into our meetings – this action is significantly important for the College," said Bigman.

Upon leaving the board in October 2019, the Board passed a resolution, which noted his accomplishments. The resolution said he played "a key role in increasing the appropriation to Diné College from \$4.2 million to \$4.7 million by offering an amendment during a discussion about higher education on the Navajo Nation; and ...a tireless advocate for the college to its stakeholders throughout the Navajo Nation."

"As a regent, Honorable Nelson BeGaye was a role model who exhibited the ability to live the philosophy of the college – Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón." "During the challenging discussions at the college, he provided stability, spiritual connection, and calmness," said Bigman. "His genuine kindness and care helped shape my leadership. When I first got on the board, I asked Regent BeGaye if he wanted to do the invocation. He mentioned 'you don't need to ask us to do it, just tell us do it.' That gave me a lot of confidence and trust."

Vice President of External Affairs Marie Etsitty Nez, a long-time College employee said, "I called him Shiyazhe by clan relation. The Etsitty family from Tsé ch'izhi knew him as the rodeo announcer for the CNRA rodeo association when he was the announcer, a family friend, and their council delegate. I also worked with Nelson serving as the Board of Regent at the College. Nelson was a great leader, and he will be missed dearly."

Tuba City campus site director Phyllis Begay said, "He provided a lot of support to the centers. He used to come to Tuba City for some of our meetings. He was incredibly supportive of the college."

As a member of the Navajo Nation Council, BeGaye represented the communities of Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields and Tsé Ch'izhí.

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