

Nygren meets with N.M. state attorney

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Discussion included bringing law students to the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — To begin establishing a partnership between the Navajo Nation and New Mexico, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren met with New Mexico State Attorney Raul Torrez on Dec. 19. The meeting, held at the Navajo Nation capital, brought together key officials to discuss various matters affecting Navajo communities.

Joining Nygren and Torrez were Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch and Deputy Attorney General Heather Clah.

The discussion covered topics such as staff shortages within the Navajo Nation Attorney General's Office, forging partnerships with colleges to provide college tuition support for Navajo students pursuing careers in law, collaboration on the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons, and cross-commissioning opportunities between Navajo police and bordering law enforcement agencies.

Nygren emphasized the urgent need to address this issue by recruiting and hiring more legal professionals to better serve the interests of the Navajo people.

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“We’re working with Arizona State University law school to bring a remote campus up here. We’re working with Diné College, because the Navajo Nation can actually start their own law school,” he said. “We could actually create a quicker pathway to where if Navajo law students go to school here, they don’t have to take the LSAT or any type of standardized tests, that they can go right away from here. So, that’s one of the things that AG Branch, myself and Diné College; we’re trying to work on building that partnership.”

Branch expressed her commitment to working with colleges to create partnerships that would financially support Navajo students majoring in law. Such initiatives aim to develop a pool of talented lawyers from the Navajo Nation who will contribute to the betterment and advancement of their community.

Nygren and Torrez also explored avenues to work together in addressing the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons. The exchange of expertise, resources and joint efforts would be instrumental in advocating for justice and ensuring the safety and well-being of Indigenous communities.

The President asked Torrez what they could do at the state level to strengthen their partnerships.

“I want perpetrators to know that they’re not going to get away with anything because New Mexico, Arizona, they’re working very closely together,” Nygren said to Torrez. “What can we do to strengthen that partnership?”

Branch added that the Navajo Nation has some of the highest number of missing and murdered cases in the country. In addition, she said fraudulent health care facilities and related care providers was also adding to the issue in the Phoenix metropolitan area, where now-defunct centers began recruiting people from various locations that included Albuquerque and Gallup.

“We do have an incident command team for Operation Rainbow Bridge, which is the Nation’s response,” Branch said. “The President established that on May 9, as soon as he learned from Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs that there was going to be enforcement actions that would result

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in displacing five to 7,000 Native people who we believe would be 90% Navajo.”

The potential for cross-commissioning opportunities between the Navajo police force and neighboring law enforcement agencies was among the topics of discussion. Such partnerships would promote coordinated efforts in maintaining law and order within the Navajo Nation’s borders.

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