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Window Rock, Ariz. — With a sign of relief for many, Navajo high school and college students are going to get paid.

Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren signed legislation in front of Navajo Nation Veterans Park May 2 to provide $2 million for Summer Youth Employment Programs.

Last month, the Navajo Nation approved the legislation with a unanimous 21-to-0 vote.

All 110 chapters have expressed a need for supplemental funds to pay for their summer youth employment programs this summer. This is particularly true in light of students going without because of the COVID-19 shutdown of chapters.

“It’s a strong investment,” Nygren said. “The Council is not afraid to invest in our youth because they’re our future.”

He said the legislation is important because so many students and their families look forward to having employment for their kids throughout the summer months.

“To be able to buy some school shoes, some school supplies or even to help their parents and grandparents buy some gas, buy some firewood, fix a door or a window or to learn how to use a hammer,” Nygren said.

Looking on were four Window Rock High School students and their teacher mentors from Club Elevate. This is a national program that teaches students skills for time management, study hacks, notetaking, study groups and teamwork, growth mindset and motivation, memory mnemonics and how to ace exams.

Navajo Nation Vice President Richelle Montoya said the legislation models teamwork to Navajo youth.

“This is something the Nygren-Montoya Administration stands behind,” she said. “We want teamwork between all three branches of government. And this is what it’s showing our youth.”

Navajo Nation Speaker Crystalyne Curley said funding jobs in students’ home chapters give them the opportunity to return in the summer to be with their families and have an income.

“This is for our youth to give them the encouragement to come back during the summer after college to give them experience within our communities,” Curley said. “A lot of times some of our families go into the hardship of financial burden. This gives the opportunity to elevate and help in that way.”

Legislation co-sponsor former Speaker Seth Damon said delegates really look to days like this to know there’s encouragement for Navajo youth.

“This legislation is $2 million to help all,” Damon said. “The chapters have an opportunity to really support students.”

Delegate Casey Johnson said the legislation was going to help students with their resumes and

give them tools that will last beyond the summer.

“I look forward to visiting the chapters and seeing our summer youth go into these roles,” Johnson said. “Always remember you are the corn pollen of yesterday’s prayers.”

Delegate Steven Arviso said he knows how important legislation like this is to students.

“I am a product of summer youth student programs,” Arviso said. “I used to work all the time through summer youth. You kids, you’re going to make Council someday. Maybe even the president.”

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