

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer urge the U.S. Department of the Treasury to establish an Office of Tribal Affairs with a politically appointed officer at the Assistant Secretary level who advises the Treasury Secretary on issues impacting tribal governments and citizens.

The U.S. Treasury plays an important role in navigating the relationship between the federal government and tribes, and frequently finds itself with vast amounts of delegated authority to determine how funds set aside for tribes by Congress should be distributed and managed, as was the case most recently with the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act.

“The creation of an Office of Tribal Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Treasury is long overdue,” Nez commented. “Tribal nations are in great need of a Treasury departmental office committed to resolving financial and tax issues impacting tribal nations, especially in the wake of the ongoing pandemic.

Given the large amount of discretion the Department of the Treasury exercises in its interactions with tribes, there have been frequent calls for the Treasury to increase the prominence of working with tribes within the department,” Nez continued.

On Sept. 29, five U.S. Senators sent a letter to the Treasury asking that it be more responsive to the needs of tribal governments by establishing an Office of Tribal Affairs, a recommendation that tribal leaders around the country support. The Department of the Treasury Tribal Advisory Committee recommended the creation of a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Tribal Governments in the Office of Economic Policy at the Department of the Treasury on March 17.

The Navajo Nation has long supported this position by encouraging the Treasury to establish an office wholly dedicated to serving tribal nations to increase the number of staff at the Department of the Treasury who are familiar with and have worked in Indian Country and to improve the tribal consultation process.

Most federal agencies have either a tribal affairs office or a designated federal official who regularly engages with tribal nations. Within the U.S. Department of the Interior, there is an

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Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs and several departmental offices that engage with tribal governments to advise the Secretary of Interior on matters impacting Indian Country.

Similarly, there is a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Tribal Affairs and a Director of Tribal Affairs within the Office of the Secretary – Governmental Affairs at the U.S. Department of Transportation. The Navajo Nation strongly recommends the Department of the Treasury make similar organizational changes to fully embrace tribal nations.

“Dual taxation continues to inhibit economic growth on the Navajo Nation and we look to the Department of the Treasury to help us develop solutions,” Lizer said. “An Office of Tribal Affairs would be able to bring these issues to the forefront, motivating change in areas ignored by the federal government.”

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