

Nez meets with U.S. Secretary of Labor to advance workforce development initiatives

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Navajo Nation Washington Office Executive Director Lashawna Tso met with the U.S. Secretary of Labor, Martin J. Walsh, and Tribal Liaison Jack Jackson, Jr. in Washington, D.C. on Sept. 14 to coordinate the implementation of federal funding and identify additional grants and opportunities to improve workforce development on the Navajo Nation.

Nez spoke about the Navajo Nation's ongoing work to implement federal funding from the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan Act for infrastructure development, which will require a skilled workforce to complete projects that will deliver more water, electricity, broadband, and other services to homes and communities.

"We have over \$2 billion dollars in ARPA funding that was recently approved for infrastructure projects and it's going to require many skilled workers to complete the work. Currently, we have many skilled Navajo men and women who are working off the Navajo Nation building stadiums, skyscrapers, and other advanced facilities. We have a large skilled workforce, but the majority of that workforce production is conducted in other places," Nez said.

He went on to explain how Walsh and the federal government plan to help the Navajo Nation build a stronger workforce.

"Today's discussion with Secretary Walsh helps us to continue working together to incorporate federal resources into the Navajo Nation Department of Workforce Development and other areas to build a stronger workforce while creating jobs and opportunities for our people to come home and build our Nation," New said.

Walsh spoke about the Department of Labor's grant funding options that support occupational skills training, apprenticeships, and other opportunities to grow and expand workforce skills. He also offered his support to work with the Navajo Nation Washington Office to identify specific funding within the ARPA and Biden Infrastructure Law that could be used for tribes to increase and improve their workforce.

The Navajo Nation Department of Workforce Development is the largest Native American

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grantee of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding and services in the United States. They provide the following services for eligible persons based on need and funds availability:

- short term employment called Work Experience
- classroom training/vocational training/GED
- lodging/rent assistance
- books/supplies assistance
- meal expenses
- Relocation or lay off assistance

Nez also requested assistance from the Labor Secretary to help Navajo veterans develop stronger skills so they can become eligible for more employment opportunities. He highlighted the success of the Navajo Veterans Administration, which worked with a carpenters union to hire Navajo workers who are currently constructing new home for veterans on the Navajo Nation.

“We’ve got the momentum and we already have a skilled workforce here on the Navajo Nation, but we have to work with Secretary Walsh and others to create a stronger and more efficient workforce. I am very grateful to the Secretary and the entire Biden-Harris Administration for their support of the Navajo Nation,” Nez said.

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