

White House addresses issue of missing/murdered Indigenous people

Written by Staff Reports

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Navajo Nation Vice President at executive order signing

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer and Second Lady Dottie Lizer joined President Donald Trump in the Oval Office, for the signing of an executive order to establish an inter-agency task force to address the epidemic of missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska persons. U.S. Attorney Gen. William Barr, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, and other tribal leaders were also in attendance at the White House for the Nov. 26 ceremony.

“This is another step forward for Indigenous nations throughout the country. I commend

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President Trump and his administration for recognizing the traumatic epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous relatives. Throughout our tribal nations, we hear far too many stories of families, victims, and survivors. So we need to keep our sacred women and children safe and protected,” Lizer said, He also offered a prayer in the moments prior to the signing.

The executive order signed in the Nov. 26 ceremony at the White House, will launch “Operation Lady Justice,” a task force led by Barr and Bernhardt to develop an aggressive, government-wide strategy to improve the safety of Native American communities. The order will also allow tribal and local law enforcement to seek assistance from the FBI and the U.S. Justice Department, who will conduct an in-depth review of federal databases to determine best practices for collecting data on missing and murdered Indigenous persons.

Attorney Gen. Barr announced the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Initiative Nov. 22. It will invest \$1.5 million to hire specialized coordinators within the offices of U.S. Attorneys, who will be tasked with developing protocols for a more coordinated response to violence against Indigenous people.

The MMIP strategy has three parts:

Establish MMIP coordinators: The Department of Justice is investing an initial \$1.5 million to hire 11 MMIP coordinators in 11 states to serve with all U.S. Attorney’s offices in those states, and others who request assistance. The states are Alaska, Ariz., Mont., Okla., Mich., Utah, Nev., Minn., Ore., N. M., and Wash.. MMIP coordinators will work closely with federal, tribal, state and local agencies to develop common protocols and procedures for responding to reports of missing or murdered indigenous people. The first MMIP coordinator is already on board in Montana.

Specialized FBI Rapid Deployment Teams: The strategy will bring needed tools and resources to law enforcement. Upon request by a tribal, state, or local law enforcement agency the FBI will provide expert assistance based upon the circumstances of a missing indigenous persons case. FBI resources and personnel which may be activated to assist with cases include: Child Abduction Rapid Deployment (CARD) teams, Cellular Analysis Support Teams, Evidence Response Teams, Cyber Agents for timely analysis of digital evidence/social media, Victim Services Division Response Teams, and others. MMIP coordinators will assist in developing protocols.

Comprehensive Data Analysis: The department will perform in-depth analyses of federally supported databases and analyze data collection practices to identify opportunities to improve missing persons data and share the results with our partners in this effort.

More broadly, the MMIP Initiative will involve a coordinated effort by more than 50 U.S. Attorneys on the Attorney General's Native American Issues Subcommittee, the FBI, and the Office of Tribal Justice, with support from the Office of Justice Programs and the Office on Violence Against Women.

THE NEED IS CLEAR

"Our Native American people experience violence at a higher rate than any other nationality in the country. The lack of reporting and investigation of missing and murdered Indigenous peoples needs to be taken seriously. The executive order gives hope to our tribal nations that justice is being sought and that there is a path for healing of our families, victims, and survivors," Myron Lizer said.

"The issue of missing and murdered Indigenous persons has not only affected families, but it impacts communities. As leaders, we must continue to advocate for safety and justice for Native women and children. Most importantly, we need to address efforts to restore balance, love, and harmony within Native homes and communities," Dottie Lizer said.

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The murder rate is ten times higher than the national average for American Indian women, with 84 percent experiencing some form of violence during their lifetime. There is still no reliable way of knowing how many Native women go missing each year, because the databases that hold statistics of these cases are outdated. Besides, issues have arisen due to the lack of coordination between law enforcement agencies.

Myron Lizer is joined in his support of the Savanna's Act by Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez. The act aims to protect American Indian women, men, and children from violent crimes. The Senate moved forward with its version in the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Committee earlier this week.

"The issues of Missing and murdered Indigenous women is a priority for the Nez-Lizer Administration. On behalf of the Navajo Nation, we extend our appreciation to the administration for taking this step to protect Indigenous women, children, and families. Much more needs to be done at every level of government to protect our people," Nez stated.