

Diné Relocatee Fund to assist relocated families

Written by Staff Reports

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Lizer: ‘Begin the healing and recovery process’

FOREST LAKE, Ariz. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer were joined by Diné relocatees and Navajo Hopi Land Commission Office Executive Director Robert Black Feb. 13, as they signed into law Resolution CJA-13-22, establishing the Diné Relocatee Fund to provide financial support for housing, infrastructure, and education for Navajo families who were relocated as a result of the Navajo-Hopi Settlement Act of 1974.

Congress passed the Act to address a land dispute between the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe. The Act divided the disputed lands, and citizens of both tribes were subject to relocation. The relocation of Navajo families led to large-scale social, agriculture, economic, and livelihood disruption and challenges.

The resolution was signed at the residence of Roy James, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, whose family resides in the community of Forest Lake, Ariz. He and his family were relocated by the federal government many years ago, and have since lived in a home that was not properly constructed. The family would be eligible for housing improvements under the new Diné Relocatee Fund.

“The families and communities who were relocated from their original home lands caused many challenges that our people are overcoming,” Nez said. “This sad legacy disrupted the Navajo

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way of life for nearly 16,000 Navajo citizens, including many elders, who separated from their ancestral homelands. Our people were moved to other communities under federal promises of adequate housing, social services, and infrastructure that have yet to be fulfilled. This law is the first step to help improve the quality of life of those families in need of infrastructure and the reconnection to purpose and recovery.”

According to the act, the Diné Relocatee Fund will be managed by the Navajo Hopi Land Commission Office under the guidance of the Navajo Hopi Land Commission. Revenue, income, payments, and proceeds generated from the Arizona New Lands acquired according to the Navajo-Hopi Settlement Act will be deposited into the Diné Relocatee Fund.

During the signing ceremony, First Lady Phefelia Nez, who’s originally from Big Mountain, located in the Hopi Partitioned Lands, also spoke about the need to heal communities and improve the quality of life for Navajo people affected by the relocation. She also said there is a need to develop health care and child care services, schools and colleges, and other services for youth and families that reside in the remote area.

“After four decades, relocated families continue to experience despair and cultural disconnection with new lands they relocated to,” Lizer said. “These negative impacts affect future generations’ well-being and health. We appreciate the recommendations and advocacy of impacted families and local chapter governments to begin the healing and recovery process.”

Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office Executive Director Robert K. Black said the creation of the fund was a long time coming, an initiative that several administrations had worked toward. He commended the Navajo president, vice-president, and the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission for their support to provide much-needed assistance for Navajo families.

“With the signing of Legislation 0006-22, the Navajo Nation has stepped up to fulfill one of the many failures of the Federal Relocation Commissioners, to provide decent and safe homes for families forced to relocate from their ancestral land. Public Law 93-531 assured the federal government that the adverse social and other impacts of relocation be developed to avoid or minimize, to the extent possible, persons involved in relocation,” former Council Delegate and Navajo Partitioned Lands resident Percy Deal said.

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“The James family is only one of thousands of ill-constructed homes into which they were placed. The legislation will provide funds to correct many of ill-constructed relocation homes and other impacts. We thank the President and the Navajo Nation Council for enacting the legislation.”

The Council approved the legislation by a vote of 21-0 on Jan. 27 during the Winter Council Session.

Diné Relocatee Fund’s balances and investments will be allocated for the following purposes:

Housing – which may include rehabilitation, repairs, renovation, roofing, weatherization, emergencies (burnouts), shelter assistance, matching funds for related activities.

Infrastructure – which may include water lines, telecommunications, powerline, septic system, solar system, and roads.

Education – which may include scholarships, immersion programs, and learning/educational materials.

Investments – which may include economic development, real estate, or other leverage/collateral programs.