



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL  
Office of the Speaker

**MEDIA CONTACTS**

Alray Nelson, Communications Director  
Kyrn Hardy, Public Information Officer  
E-mail: [nnlb.communications@gmail.com](mailto:nnlb.communications@gmail.com)  
Phone: (928) 530-8329

## Navajo Veterans Advisory Council advocates for Navajo Code Talkers and Veterans Hospital to Arizona Senator Mark Kelly

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PHOTO: Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. with Senator Mark Kelly and members of the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council.

**FORT DEFIANCE, Ariz.** — Arizona Senator Mark Kelly joined 24th Navajo Nation Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. and members of the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council (NNVAC) for a meeting to discuss the lack of direct services for veterans and the establishment of a Navajo regional office by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Advisory Council members that attended included Vern Lee (Northern Agency), Tim Johnson (Chinle Agency), Cici Baker (Chinle Agency), and Olin Kieyoomia (Fort Defiance Agency).

“There are only four Navajo Code Talkers alive after 76 years since World World II ended,” said Co-Commander Vern Lee. “Our veterans continue to wait for direct assistance in dilapidated homes with no electricity or running water. There is an immediate need for direct funding to construct homes for our veterans and their families. We need access to quality healthcare services and for the United States to uphold its commitment to the warriors that fought bravely in all foreign wars.”

U.S. Senator Mark Kelly is a retired U.S. Navy combat pilot, engineer, and NASA astronaut. A Tucson resident, his wife is former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords. As a naval aviator he made two deployments to the First Gulf War and flew 39 combat missions in Operation Desert Storm.

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Army veteran and Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) urged the senator to introduce Congressional legislation to create a Navajo Nation VA regional office and establish a VA hospital: “The United States has an obligation to help our veterans and to be there for them. A majority of our warriors lack the transportation to make doctor appointments, must travel many miles for their basic needs, and have no clean water or electricity in their homes. Change needs to happen now and you need to advocate for us in the United States Senate.”

The leadership meeting included topics covering veteran housing needs, health care access, increasing mental health services for post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), and assistance for Navajo veterans with disabilities.

“It concerns us that a Department of Veterans Affairs office is absent on the Navajo Nation to provide us direct service,” said Commander Tim Johnson (Chinle Agency). “Our Native American veterans have provided invaluable service and allegiance to the United States. The Central Navajo Veterans Organization represents 16 Navajo chapters that includes warriors that have served or are currently in the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps. The Navajo Nation Council has requested multiple times for the VA, Congress, and President Biden to establish veteran services now.”

In 2020, the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council was created with the purpose to provide recommendations to the Executive Branch and to advocate on behalf of all Navajo veterans, their qualified surviving spouses, and Gold Star Mothers with quality, transparent and consistent service.

The NNVAC consists of eleven members, with one female and male representative from each agency.

“Through all foreign conflicts, hundreds of our Navajo men and women have enlisted without hesitation to serve our country and to defend our way of life,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh). “Many of our warriors joined the Marines, Army, Navy, Air Force and other branches of the Armed Forces to serve honorably to protect our freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the freedom to protect our Navajo homeland. We owe a great debt to the families of our veterans and urge Senator Kelly to push forward legislation that will take care of our service members.”

The next few months, Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr., and advisory council members plan to advocate for Navajo veterans issues to Congress and meet with Secretary Denis McDonough at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Local veteran organizations will work with Senator Kelly to update the official number of veterans on the Navajo Nation, data on how many veterans reside in Arizona, and the number of veterans who are disabled or homeless.

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