



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Spring Council Session highlights autism awareness, sexual violence prevention, and the Ramah Settlement

WINDOW ROCK – This week, the 23rd Navajo Nation Council presented several recognition awards during the 2017 Spring Council Session. Among them, three of the recognitions related to the Worldwide Autism Awareness Day on April 2, sexual violence prevention and awareness, and the Ramah Navajo Settlement.

On the first day of the session, Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) presented a plaque to recognize eight year-old Jasmine Miller who aided in the establishment of Worldwide Autism Awareness Day, in which former President Barack Obama signed a proclamation establishing April 2 as the official awareness day throughout the country.

Jasmine was born in Fort Defiance and is in the second-grade. Her maternal clan is Tó'aheedlínii (Water Flowing Together) and her paternal clan is Naakai Dine'é (Mexican Clan). Jasmine's parents are Rosabelle and Edward Miller, and her family is originally from Lukachukai.

According to her mother, Jasmine started her journey over a year ago with her brother Samuel Miller, who is diagnosed with autism. She traveled around different areas on and off the Navajo Nation to encourage people to sign a pledge and to wear blue on April 2 for autism awareness.

Delegate Hale said that Jasmine realized that there was a need for it to be recognized nationally, so last year, Jasmine wrote a letter to former President Obama and expressed her concerns. In the fall of 2016, President Obama wrote back to Jasmine with a signed copy of the presidential proclamation declaring April 2 as World Autism Awareness Day.

"She did this for her brother Samuel because she wanted to be a voice for him, and due to her perseverance and dedication—awareness has been brought to this issue nationally. I want Jasmine to always remember that even if she doesn't have a title like the rest of us on Council, we thank her for being proactive and having the courage to do that for her family," said Delegate Hale.

Ten-year old Samuel was born in Goodyear, Ariz. and is in the fourth grade. He was diagnosed with autism at the age of three and was not able to communicate for a period of time. However,

he was enrolled into a school that provided therapy and he was soon able to learn to effectively communicate, said his mother.

On the opening day of the session, chair for the Naabik'íyáti' Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'í), announced the "Start by Believing" campaign.

"What we want to do is to make sure that when victims who are afraid to come forward because they are not believed, or are chastised by an overworked system—we do not want them to feel ashamed. We want to tell them that we recognize that they are going through heartache and that there are people who believe their story," said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty said the campaign seeks to change the response to sexual assault and to end the cycle of silence to encourage victims to come forward, and to inspire Navajo communities to be an integral support system to sexual assault survivors.

"When someone comes to me and says they were raped or sexually assaulted, I pledge to start by believing. I want everybody in this room to learn more about it, to learn how you can help your community, and how you can help your children," said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty also presented a policy brief to Council entitled, "Protect Navajo Children: The Impact of Sexual Violence," which was developed with the aid of the Navajo Sexual Violence Prevention Workgroup, explains the current status of sexual violence on the Navajo Nation, offers a summary of statistical insight, and provides recommendations to the Council.

Council also recognized the Deleana Otherbull from the Coalition to STOP Violence Against Native Women and Shannon Hoshnic from the Sexual Assault Services of Northwest New Mexico, for their advocacy and dedication to sexual violence prevention and to promote awareness through public education.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) presented a recognition award to Earla Begay, a former Navajo Nation accountant who discovered that the federal government had failed to effectively calculate and negotiate indirect cost rates, resulting in the *Ramah Navajo Chapter v. Jewell* settlement, in which the Navajo Nation was awarded \$58 million.

Delegate Tsosie said when she brought the matter to leaders, they did not take the matter seriously the first time. However, as time progressed, Begay was able to convince the chapter and the Nation there was a significant discrepancy in the IDC rate owed to the Navajo Nation.

"A long, long time ago Earla was quietly working at her desk and looking at the account numbers and she realized, 'this is not right, I think the U.S. government is short changing us.' When you're

by yourself, sometimes your supervisor and others don't believe you, but when you are persistent, your diligence can really make an impact," said Delegate Tsosie.

Over the past 35 years, she worked with tribal governments and organizations, gained professional experience and knowledge in accounting, financial management, indirect costs, grants and contracts administration, and audits, added Delegate Tsosie.

"The tremendous benefit that her persistence and her intellect has brought forth, and in her prayer, because I don't doubt that she did this without prayer, for the strength to do this. On behalf of the Navajo Nation, we thank you Earla Begay—you truly helped the Navajo people," said Delegate Tsosie.

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