



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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25th Navajo Nation Council celebrates veterans, youth leaders, and equestrian champions



Council Delegate Brenda Jesus recognizes Army veterans Robert Smith Sr. and Leo Chischilly during the 2025 Navajo Nation Council Winter Session.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Tuesday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council recognized the contributions of Diné youth leaders, equestrian professionals, and veteran advocates who have demonstrated outstanding commitment to their communities and culture.

Council Delegate Brenda Jesus (Oaksprings, St. Michaels) led a special recognition for two distinguished Army veterans, Robert Smith Sr. and Leo Chischilly, honoring their service and continued dedication to Navajo veterans.

Smith, a Vietnam War veteran who served 10 months overseas before his honorable discharge in 1963, was recognized for his tireless efforts in advocating for local veterans and his initiative to establish a veterans' park in Oak Springs. Despite personal hardships, including the loss of his wife and son in 2020, Smith remains a strong advocate for his community, working to create a space of honor and healing for fellow veterans.

"You remind me of my father," Delegate Jesus shared. "It's good to feel like you have family, and I feel I have family in Oak Springs."

Chischilly, who served as the veterans' commander for the Oak Springs and Pine Springs chapters, was commended for his advocacy at all levels of government. His family donated initial funds for the Oak Springs and Pine Springs Veterans Park project in 2018, a vision that continues to be realized with support from current leadership.

The local Veterans Organization Commander Linda OneSalt expressed gratitude to Chischilly's family, stating, "Leo taught me a lot. I admired his poise and dedication to his community. Even when faced with harsh words from delegates, he remained calm. I intend to carry on his vision." In appreciation, Chischilly's family was presented with a commemorative quilt.

Delegate Andy Nez (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill) honored students from Window Rock High School for their work on bringing awareness to domestic violence and acknowledged their efforts in organizing community events. The Domestic Violence Awareness Walk held early winter was successful because of their hard work.

"Your presence and participation in your community are key to making a difference," Nez stated. "I hope one of you takes a seat in this Council or even the Speaker's chair one day. Success comes in different ways, but overall, my main advice is to give back to society".

Among those recognized was Harmony Begay, a former Miss Navajo Pine High School. Delegate Dr. Nez commended her dedication and desire to community service during her entire reign. One example he shared was her participation to assist unsheltered relatives during the holidays.

Delegate Curtis Yanito (Mexican Water, Aneth, Tecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) revered the achievements of Diné equestrian athletes, highlighting their role in preserving the deep cultural and historical significance of horsemanship within the Navajo Nation.

Among the honorees was Capt. Alonzo Tohtsonie, a 23-year Army veteran and intelligence officer with the Army Reserves, recognized for his leadership in equestrian enforcement. Tohtsonie is also served on the U.S. Army's polo team.

Professional horse racing jockey Cordarelton Benn was also honored for his success in the horse racing industry, having competed professionally for 11 years and ranking in the top 50 nationwide for the past five years. With 17 wins last year and total career earnings exceeding \$5 million, Benn's accomplishments were celebrated by the Council.

"I'm proud of all our children, especially those recognized here today," said Delegate Yanito, emphasizing the importance of celebrating and supporting young Diné talent.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council remains committed to uplifting and honoring individuals who make meaningful contributions to their communities through service, advocacy, and cultural preservation.

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