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# Arizona legislators want 'to make all feel welcome'



by Indian Country Today Jan 16 - edited

The State of Arizona hosts 25th annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day

By Aliyah Chavez, Kalle Benallie and Quindrea Yazzie

The Arizona Capitol was a busy place Wednesday. Tribal dignitaries spoke in their respective languages on the gallery floor. Native children were on the grounds having traveled from across the state. Indian princesses posed for photos and shook hands.

A routine day in Phoenix. Especially during the Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day.

Arizona is home to 22 tribal nations and it's the law for the Governor's Office on Tribal Relations to host a tribal legislative day once a year. The event serves as an opportunity for tribal leaders to convene with state lawmakers. The event started in 1995 and was established by the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona.

A highlight of yesterday's event included a joint protocol session on the House gallery floor. The room was decorated with 22 photo panels hanging from the walls to depict the Grand Canyon. One panel for every tribal nation in the state.

"We wanted to make all feel welcome," said Speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives Russell Bowers.



Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez  
@NNPrezNez

Thank you to the 54th Arizona State Legislature for the opportunity to address House and Senate leadership about the priorities for the Navajo Nation! Ahe'hee'



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[See Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez's other Tweets](#)

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez said his administration is working to increase Navajo law school and physician graduates. He announced the Navajo Nation is also engaged in advancing renewable energy. President Nez also addressed the impacts of the closing of the Navajo Generating Station on their reservation.



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Vice Chairman of the Havasupai Tribe Matthew Putesoy spoke largely about the importance of water to his village located at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. He says the tribe is worried about contaminated water from uranium mining, adding that losing their sole water supply "would be a death sentence."

Putesoy added that the Havasupai have begun building their own high-speed internet connection to expand their telecommunication abilities.

Chairman of the Tohono O'odham Nation Ned Norris also gave a State of Tribal Nations Address. He urged for more conversation of the state's tribal gaming compact as it funds many of the tribe's infrastructure projects.

Norris called for collaboration among Arizona's tribes and used his remarks as an opportunity to remind tribal leaders about the significance of tribal sovereignty.

"We need to work together to protect our rich, cultural heritage," he said.



The Arizona State Capitol on the 25th annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day in Phoenix, Arizona. Photo by Aliyah Chavez.

The tribal legislative day also offered an information session that focused on elder services for Arizona tribes. Some areas of improvement they suggested were home delivered meals, better transportation and more aid for caregivers.

The discussion was held by the [Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. Area Agency of Aging, Region 8](#). It serves 21 of the 22 federally recognized tribes in Arizona, excluding the Navajo Nation which operates its own agency.

The program's director Laurai Atcity, Navajo and Taos Pueblo, said they are advocating for the 2020 United States Census to provide accurate numbers than the 2010 census. She said it will help them understand the amount of senior services needed.

"It's very important that we support and promote everybody to be available, aware and participate in the census," Atcity said.

Some of their services offer traditional Native food and ceremonial practices for elders. Atcity said they try to accommodate requests under their [Tribal Ombudsman Program](#) which protects human and civil rights of long term care residents.

Atcity added they are also requesting an additional \$5 million under Arizona's general fund appropriation to allocate to the Aging and Adult Services division within the Arizona Department of Economic Security.

"We're going to have more people needing these services and that means were spreading that funding even thinner," she said.



Native Youth Know youth forum discussed issues affecting their communities before presenting to tribal leaders and state representatives Wednesday afternoon.



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Photo by Quindrea Yazzie.&nbsp;

Not only did Indigenous community leaders and legislators come together as adults sharing their priorities for tribal communities ... but so did the youth.

Native Youth Know was created to provide a forum for the youth to have a voice at the Tribal Legislative Day, said Rafael F. Tapia Jr, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, who is Vice President of the Partnership with Native Americans.

"We want to know what are their priorities, what are their concerns, and then with that, identify what are the things that are going to help solve these things in their communities," Tapia said.

The youth have the ability to make changes in their communities, Tapia said. This forum was created to give them a platform and to exercise their voices of priority and concern.

Groups of Native youth discussed issues from drug and alcohol abuse to diabetes and illegal trash dumping to the tribal leaders and state representatives including Gila River Indian Community Lt. Gov. Robert Stone and Gila River Indian Community Governor, Stephen Lewis.

What we are talking about on so many different levels are sacred ideas, Lewis said. "They are sacred ideas and seeds that you are planting for the future."

Lewis concluded: "Never forget who we are and never forget our guidance system. Never forget our language, our culture, our tie to the land and our tie to our ancestors."

Yesterday's event in Arizona is one of a handful happening across the country this year.

Utah will host its American Indian Caucus Day on Feb. 6 and American Indian Day will happen at the New Mexico State Capitol on Feb. 7.



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