



## The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### **Thomas Walker presents health priorities at the FY 2010 National Budget Formulation work session in Anaheim**

**ANAHEIM, Calif.** – Thomas Walker, Jr., Chair of the Health & Social Services Committee of the Navajo Nation Council, along with staff from the Department of Health and the Navajo Area Indian Health Service presented the Navajo Area budget and health priorities for fiscal year 2010 to tribal leaders, Indian health advocates, and Indian Health Service representatives on Wednesday, Feb. 13 at the FY 2010 National Budget Formulation work session.

Mr. Walker (Birdsprings/Leupp/Tolani Lake) explained how the Navajo Area Indian Health Service (NAIHS) developed its priorities and recommended support and advocacy for increased federal funding for the Indian Health Service (IHS) in fiscal year 2010.

Walker has consistently ranked healthcare facility and sanitation facility construction as its top two priorities in the past five years - this is due to the overwhelming needs throughout the Navajo Nation.

“Without new state-of-the-art healthcare facilities, the 238,000 users of the Navajo Area healthcare system will continue to place a burden on the existing facilities across the Navajo Nation,” Walker said in referring to the current facilities that include six hospitals, eight health centers, nine health stations, and 20 dental clinics. “Without healthcare facilities, the health status of our people will not improve at the rates that we wish for, especially those who do not have electricity and running water in their homes.”

Walker also advocated for the funding needs for Native Americans for Community Action, the only urban center in the Navajo Area, located in Flagstaff, Ariz. This advocacy comes after the current federal administration proposed to eliminate funding for 34 urban programs that serve American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

Walker said that the Navajo Area’s recommendations for fiscal year 2010 includes funding request for healthcare facility construction, sanitation facility construction, injury prevention, diabetes programs, heart disease, behavioral health services, mental health services, dental, cancer, and infectious diseases.

According to a recent report to the Navajo Nation Council by the NAIHS, there are approximately 24,000 diabetes cases on the Navajo Nation. There has been a dramatic increase since 1998, when the tally was at 14,000 people.

It was also reported by the NAIHS that approximately 30 percent – one out of three people – over the age of 40 has a diagnosis of diabetes. It was also explained that if we were to include all those individuals 20 years or older, it is almost 20 percent or one out of five people that have diabetes.

Mr. Walker stressed the importance of maintaining “one voice, one budget” in the advocacy for the Indian Health Service budget when tribal leaders and national organizations advocate to congressional members and to the Health & Social Services Department.

Walker explained that advocacy is very crucial and that we need to emphasize the needs of tribal communities, because they are the ones that need adequate healthcare service for their children and the elderly.

The annual national meeting for the IHS gives tribal leaders and representatives from the twelve service areas a chance to present their respective budget needs and their challenges. This meeting provides a venue for discussion, comparison, and consolidations of recommendations in creating one national budget for the IHS.

For more information, contact Joshua Lavar Butler with the Office of the Speaker at 928-871-6384.

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