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# NAVAJO-HOPI *Observer*

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## Nygren calls for \$50 million funding in 50 years for NHRA



Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Director Sarah Slim, former Navajo County Supervisor Percy Deal, relocatees Mona Seamon, Herbert George and Elmer Clark join Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren in Window Rock to present their first briefing on Navajo relocation resulting from the 1974 Relocation Act. Also at the meeting was Navajo Nation Council Legislative District Assistant Marley Shebala (far left) and Division of Natural Resources Director Mike Halona (far right). (Photo/OPVP)

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Next year, the Navajo-Hopi Relocation Act turns 50 years old.

On Oct. 10, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren heard stories of the historic tragedy and \$598 million governmental failure that was dropped onto the Navajo Nation by Congress 13 years before he was born.

It was widely acknowledged by none other than the late U.S. Sen. John McCain and Sen. Barry Goldwater that relocation was a failed policy, an ill-conceived plan born of hopes to resolve a decades-long land dispute among North America's most traditional people.

On a frosty morning in December 1974, Navajos woke up to learn that President Gerald Ford had signed the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act into law.



### Monterey Jack Cheese Soup

P.L. 93-531, a law that authorized the relocation of Navajos and Hopis from lands divided between the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe, was always more commonly referred to by one word: relocation.

The first generation of relocatees, Navajo-only speaking sáaniis and cheiis from remote places like Big Mountain, Teesto, Coal Mine Mesa and Fingerpoint who just wanted to live their lives in peace and be left alone by the government, ultimately lost everything.

The issue continues to paralyze Navajos today. Their children are the second generation, now middle-aged relocatees who inherited the heart-wrenching, tear-filled struggle for promised benefits like septic systems for 40-year-old relocation homes and repairs for cracked foundations.

They are haunted by childhood memories of grandma's loom, hogan, cornfield and peach trees, now abandoned to the elements in a place they can never return to.

They cradle in their minds thoughts of grandpa's long-lost prized horses, cattle and sheep.

On paper, the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute ended on Sept. 21, 2010. That's when the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe filed a Notice of Settlement and Voluntary Dismissal of Appeal in the original 1958 Healing vs. Jones lawsuit that ultimately led to the 1974 Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act.

The long, expensive litigation over the 1882 Executive Order Hopi Reservation that resulted in first the Joint Use Area, and then the separated Navajo Partitioned Land and Hopi Partitioned Land was finally over. The Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute came to a quiet official end that wasn't even mentioned in the news.

The relocatees briefing Nygren remember those who pleaded their case to every sympathetic Navajo leader since Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter MacDonald, Peterson Zah, Albert Hale and all who followed up to now.

On Oct. 10, Former Navajo County Supervisor Percy Deal, relocatees Mona Seamon, Herbert George and Elmer Clark went to Window Rock to tell their story yet again.

Although relocation eventually faded from public awareness long ago, succeeding generations of relocatees like them still struggle on.

"Relocation just busted us," said Ms. Seamon. "We all fell apart. All these years of presidents said, 'We'll work for you.' Then nothing happened."

She told of relocatees who moved to a town to live in a relocation house, had no money to pay its taxes and then lost the house.

Not only were they forced to move from the only land their grandmothers or they ever knew, they no longer had the replacement house to show for it and shelter them.

Seamon said the one thing relocatees sought through the years was money to address their problems. They couldn't get it from the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation or their chapters. They need new millions to help repair old houses and young lives, she said.

"Next year the Relocation Act will be 50 years old," she said.

That was the spark.

“Fifty million in 50 years,” President Nygren said immediately. “That’s the goal. Let’s make that a goal. What can we accomplish by next year?”

With the 50-year anniversary of the Relocation Act and Navajos still suffering from it, combined with a new generation of congress people, a young, new Navajo Nation Council and a young President, all who are eager to help the Navajo people, a congressional or tribal appropriation could help turn the corner for many relocatee families.

“We just really need to push,” said newly-appointed Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Director Sarah Slim on her second day on the job.

She said her first objective is to coordinate with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice to identify how much money is in accounts created to benefit relocatees.

“Fifty million in 50 years,” Nygren repeated. “It’s only as good as the support you get across the street. You’ve got my support, that’s for sure.”

Just ask and set the priority, he told them. He explained that elders assume a president can do anything like former chairmen could. But it doesn’t work like that anymore, he said. It requires diplomacy to get things done.

“Fifty million,” he said. “In order to get anything done, you’ve got to have money.”

Get with your council delegates, he told them. With funding help from the Navajo Nation Council, a lot could be done. He suggested they work to get legislation passed by January 2024.

“You should fight for your own pot of money,” he said. “Then it will be on my side to get contracts out.”

With ARPA, he said, “we can immediately do something. My challenge to you — work with delegates. I’m all on board. It’s a really tough problem. I like things that are the biggest problems.”

Information provided by the Office of the President and Vice President.