

**Testimony of Angela Barney Nez, Executive Staff Assistant  
The Navajo Nation  
To the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Housing and Community  
Opportunity,  
April 10, 2010**

Good Morning Chairman Waters and Representative Kirkpatrick. Thank you for holding this important field hearing in Window Rock to highlight the needs of our Navajo Nation veterans, and to discuss H.R. 3553, The Indian Veterans Housing Opportunity Act of 2009. My name is Angela Barney Nez and I work in the Navajo Nation office of President Dr. Joe Shirley, Jr. As I am sure you saw during your travels to Window Rock through our beautiful homeland, the Navajo Nation is vast. Across our nearly 17 million acres live more than 205,000 Navajos many of whom live in remote and isolated areas without water or electricity. Amongst our population live more than 12,433 former service members. Our Navajo Veterans represent the largest population of Native Americans to serve in the U.S. armed forces.

**Navajo Nation Service to the Country**

Historically, a greater proportion of Native Americans serve in the armed forces of the United States than any other ethnic group. As a people, Navajos have a high respect for our veterans. Traditional Navajo culture and society identifies veterans with the Navajo concept of “protector” and “defenders” of the Navajo homeland and the Navajo Way of Life. Our Navajo Warriors have voluntarily served in all of Americas major 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century conflicts. This includes serving in World War I before Navajos were recognized as citizens and had the opportunity to vote.

The most visible group of Navajo veterans are the Navajo Code Talkers who were able to create over 800 codes that were undeciphered by the Japanese during the Asian-Pacific campaigns in World War II. We are also exceedingly proud of the significant number of our female veterans.

The Navajo people have long sacrificed in service to our country. Unfortunately, these sacrifices have given rise to many unique challenges when our veterans return home. The Navajo Nation is rural and isolated with an unemployment rate exceeding 50% and a per capita income of \$6,800. We lack basic water, power, and transportation resources for economic development, and our healthcare system is insufficient to meet the needs of our people. For our veterans, many of whom are disabled, this means they return from service without employment prospects, housing, and unable to reach healthcare facilities.

### **Veterans Housing Assistance Need on the Navajo Nation**

The Navajo Nation supports H.R. 3553 the “Indian Veterans Housing Opportunity Act of 2009” sponsored by Representative Anne Kirkpatrick, because it honors the sacrifice of our Navajo Nation veterans. By excluding our Navajo veterans from Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996 “NAHASDA” income reporting requirements our veterans will no longer be punished for receiving compensation for the injuries and disabilities they suffered throughout their service.

Many of our Veterans live in isolated areas, miles from the nearest paved roads and available utilities, such as water and power. In many cases, these veterans live in substandard unsafe conditions without running water, electricity, sewer, or septic systems.

When our Navajo Veterans, who receive compensation under Title 38, United States Code, Chapter 11 for a service related injury, then apply for shelter from NAHASDA funded homes, they are denied eligibility because of this compensation. More than one-third of veterans who apply for NAHASDA housing funds are rejected because of these income requirements. Our veterans have already faced the trauma of their service related injury, but then must make their own way in our isolated lands with limited infrastructure availability.

The Navajo Nation supports H.R. 3553 and its official exemption from income eligibility determination for service related injuries. Passing this legislation will immediately change the housing situation on the Navajo Nation for our veterans. We thank Congresswoman Kirkpatrick for working to ease the burdens of Navajo veterans and sincerely hope this legislation will pass the Congress and be signed into law by the President. While this bill makes its way through the legislative process, we would also request from the members of the committee for assistance in seeking an administrative solution to our housing problem. Having Navajo veterans classified as “essential to the community” will allow HUD to set reasonable caps on income and assist these veterans to acquire safe comfortable housing.

### **Conclusion**

Chairman Waters, Honorable Members of the subcommittee, Congresswoman Kirkpatrick, on behalf of the Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., I wish to express my deep appreciation for this opportunity to provide testimony to the Subcommittee on Housing and Community. The Navajo Nation looks forward to working with the Subcommittee on a government-to-government relationship as we move forward with this important legislation concerning the future of the H.R. 3553, Indian Veterans Housing and Assistance Act of 2009. Thank you.