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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Friday, February 29, 2008

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### **Dennehotso Advocates to Move School Construction Back on Top of Priority List**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Members of the Dennehotso community met with Congress this week to place the construction of the BIA replacement school on high priority.

Federal funds which were designated for construction of the Dennehotso school in 2006, were internally deferred by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) to be used for a shortfall in funding.

“We met with the BIE seven months ago and their reply was we would be placed on the back burner for three years,” Council Delegate Katherine Benally said in her meeting with Congressman Rick Renzi, R-AZ-1.

“I was surprised that they were going to use our money for the shortfall,” said Council Delegate Benally, re-stating what she recalled bureau officials told her in a meeting.

In 2006, cost for the construction of the Dennehotso school, to replace the existing one was placed at \$15.7 million. Last fall’s revised estimates place the project cost at \$19.1 million.

The community narrative presented by Council Delegate Benally illustrates that the federal Bureau of Indian Education’s decision to delay the construction “jeopardizes the academic achievement of students” in a school that serves both Utah and Arizona.

Congressman Renzi, who has worked to get the school construction funded committed his support to placing the school back on the priority list, and to begin construction without delay.

The Dennehotso community has since received the support of the Navajo Nation Council Education Committee, and the Intergovernmental Relations Committee. The Intergovernmental Relations Committee acted this month to request the BIE to maintain the construction list and not suspend or delay funding.



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In October 2007, a special Education committee meeting was held in Window Rock, where BIE representatives were present to give a report on the school construction funding shortfall. The Interior Department's facilities director presented a lengthy report to the committees, reaffirming the agency's decision for construction projects, including Dennehotso.

"So we have come up with a plan, by delaying the start of the construction, I think five or six schools a year," said Jack Rever, an engineer who oversees school construction for the BIE. There are several schools awaiting construction through the country. Later in the meeting Rever again referred to the delay. "We do our work according to the priority list and priority fashion, the next dollars which become available which will be in 2009, 2010, 2011 fiscal years," said Rever.

Council Delegate Benally, who was accompanied by Gilbert Todachine, Sr. and Irene Clah, chapter leaders, met with others in congress including Congressman Jim Matheson's office, and Congressman Tom Udall. Congressional meetings were arranged by Clara Pratte of the Navajo Nation Washington Office, who oversees education, community and economic development.

Council Delegate Benally cited the school's deteriorated conditions including asbestos contamination, covered with carpet, and unsafe conditions, replete with heating problems and space requirements.

Council Delegate Benally will continue with follow up measures to place a high priority on the construction of the replacement school for Dennehotso.

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