



T-WE:M 'O BA'IC E S-GE:WPK  
TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER

# NEWSLETTER

TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION

APR 2025

PO Box 837  
Sells, AZ 85634

520-383-2028

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRWOMAN

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

### *In this issue:*

- Federal Update, p2
- Raul Grijalva, p2
- BIE Town Hall, p2
- Vice Chairwoman's testimony, p3
- Four Tribes Meeting, p3
- Arizona Real ID Deadline, p4
- ASU Honors the Nation, p4

S-ke:g Tas! Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. Spring has finally arrived and many plants across our beautiful desert home are in bloom. But our administration has not stopped to smell the flowers – we are continuing to move forward on a range of important issues impacting the Tohono O'odham Nation.

I was proud to recently have had the opportunity to meet with leaders of our three sister tribes. We discussed the urgent need to work together to protect our people's mutual interests. It was a great example of how together we are stronger. You will find more details about the meeting and our next steps on page 3.

The Vice Chairwoman and I continue to work with the Legislative Council and staff to stand up for the Nation's rights in the face of continued attacks on our rights and resources by the Trump Administration. An update on the latest activity can be found on page 2.

I also had the pleasure of joining Vice Chairwoman Johnson and the Legislative Council in a virtual town hall on the Trump Administration's proposed alternatives for BIE schools. It was a great opportunity to hear comments from tribal members about this misguided proposal and I want to thank everyone who took the time to participate in the town hall. More detail on this issue is on page 2.



In recent weeks, we have also said goodbye to a great statesman and champion of the Tohono O'odham Nation, the late Congressman Raúl Grijalva. He represented the Nation in Congress for more than two decades and was always there when we needed an ally. I had the bittersweet honor of joining with leaders from Arizona and across the country to say farewell to our good friend at his celebration of life. You can read more on page 2

Raúl Grijalva set an example for all of us on how to stand up for your principles and do the right thing. He always put the people first in everything he did. His legacy serves as an inspiration for all of us to better serve our communities, to hold true to our values, and to stand tall against external forces that do not share our interests. Together we are stronger!

Verlon Jose, Chairman  
Tohono O'odham Nation



## FEDERAL UPDATES

President Trump recently instituted widespread tariffs on imports from nearly 100 countries, then paused the implementation of those tariffs after widespread outcry, with the exception of China. These actions have created confusion and chaos. Tariffs will undoubtedly impact tribal members since they are basically a tax increase. The Executive Office is reviewing the potential impact that price increases will have on tribal members and the Nation.

In recent weeks, Nation leadership has met with federal officials from the Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, re-emphasizing the position that any plan to implement walls or deploy active military along the border is unacceptable.

There are multiple reports that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has been active on Arizona university campuses. There have not been any reports of tribal students being detained or questioned, but it is important that all tribal members be prepared should that happen. Always keep Tribal Identification Cards with you, including while on campus. The Nation's leaders have been in contact with each of Arizona's universities to help ensure tribal students are not mistreated. Any tribal students who have questions, concerns, or need to report an incident should call (520) 383-3410.

In a positive development, multiple key federal agencies have now issued directives acknowledging that programs meant to benefit tribes are not "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" (DEI) but, to the contrary, are based on the federal government's trust obligations. We continue to monitor, but this should preserve critical federal programs and funding benefiting the Nation

### Remembering Raúl Grijalva

Chairman Jose was honored to participate in Rep. Raúl Grijalva's celebration of life at El Casino Ballroom on March 26. The Tohono O'odham Nation has benefited from Grijalva's unwavering support as a public servant who spent his career advocating for the rights of tribal communities.

Through a lifetime dedicated to public service, Grijalva served as a community organizer, a TUSD Governing Board Member, a Pima County Supervisor, and a Member of Congress. In every role, he was a steadfast advocate for the people, championing equality for all, promoting clean air and water, and working towards comprehensive solutions to border challenges.

Most notably, Grijalva served as Chairman of the influential House Committee on Natural Resources for many years. He played a key role in the passage of the Arizona Water Rights Settlements Act in 2004, ensuring the Nation has access to critical water resources. Grijalva was also a vocal proponent of the Nation's sovereignty on issues related to border wall construction and the harm it would have on the land and the people. Grijalva also lent his support to the Nation's years-long effort to transfer land into trust near Glendale, Ariz. for the purpose of constructing a casino. He leaves behind an incredible legacy of achievements.

### Town Hall on BIE School Alternatives

The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) is seeking input from tribes on President Trump's Executive Order that would allow families to use federal funding for non-BIE schools. The Nation's leadership opposes this move and has filed substantive comment with BIE that detail the Nation's opposition to the proposal. This comes at the same time as President Trump moves to dismantle the Department of Education, raising significant concerns about the availability of Pell Grants for college students, and critical funding for special education services and Title I schools.

Regarding the BIE schools proposal, Nation leaders wanted to hear directly from tribal members. A virtual town hall was organized on March 18, 2025, with Chairman Jose and Vice Chairwoman Johnson joining the Legislative Council to hear directly from the people.

Parents, teachers, and many other stakeholders shared their comments about the BIE schools proposal and its potential impact on O'odham students. These comments were included with the Nation's formal response that was filed with BIE. The Nation's comments can be viewed under Public Notices at <https://tolc-nsn.org/>.





### **Vice Chairwoman's Congressional Testimony on Funding Priorities**

Vice Chairwoman Carla Johnson, along with other tribal leaders from across the country, testified on the Nation's funding priorities before the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies.

During the meeting, the Vice Chairwoman discussed the chronic underfunding of key infrastructure and services for tribal members. This included the Nation's 1982 water rights settlement -- which has never received the funding to be fully implemented -- as well as the poor condition of BIA roads and the urgently needed repairs and replacements for two BIE schools. Vice Chairwoman Johnson urged Congress to provide adequate funding for these items and uphold the federal government's trust responsibility.

Other priority areas for funding that were discussed include public safety and healthcare. The Vice Chairwoman described the financial hindrance on the Nation to support U.S. border security and focused her discussion on the federal government reimbursing the Nation for these expenditures and provide additional funding to support facility upgrades. She also stressed the need to address the chronic underfunding of Indian Health Services (IHS) and called on Congress to fully fund the 60-year-old Sells Hospital, which has been on the IHS construction priority list for more than 30 years.

The Vice Chairwoman's testimony effectively conveyed the Nation's funding priorities and were well-received by both Republican and Democratic leaders. Members of Congress expressed appreciation of the detailed information and acknowledged the importance of funding these essential programs and projects on the Nation.

### **Four Sister Tribes Meet to Coordinate Action**

On March 22, 2025, Chairman Jose and Vice Chairwoman Johnson joined leaders from the Gila River Indian Community, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, and the Ak-Chin Indian Community for a summit of the four sister tribes. The focus of the meeting was to discuss opportunities for working together on common issues in the changing federal and state political landscape.

Each tribe brought its own issues of concern to the meeting, including the Trump Administration's immigration enforcement policies and the disgraceful decision to remove tribal flags from the Phoenix Veterans Administration hospital. The conversation was productive, as leaders from all four tribes recognized that we are stronger together.

One of the first significant actions coming out of the meeting is a joint letter prepared by the Nation which calls on the U.S. General Services Administration to halt its plan to close the BIA Western Regional Office in Phoenix. The office serves 53 tribes in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah, including all four sister tribes. Shutting down this office would create additional delays and obstacles in accessing services from an agency that is already understaffed and underfunded. The four tribes letter calls on the GSA to uphold its trust responsibility and consult with tribes rather than unilaterally close the BIA regional office.



Seated L to Right: Gila River Governor Stephen Roe Lewis, Nation Chairman Verlon Jose, guest speaker U.S. Rep. David Schweikert (R-AZ), Salt River President Martin Harvier, and Ak-Chin Chairman Gabriel Lopez.



## Arizona Real ID Deadline is May 7

Starting May 7, 2025, a normal Arizona driver's license might not be enough to get you on an airplane. You will need to get a new type of card that complies with Real ID requirements, called the Arizona Travel ID. You can get this either as a driver's license or as a basic ID card if you do not drive. Real IDs are made of material that is more difficult to counterfeit and they expire after eight years. Children under 18 do not need a Real ID.

To get a Real ID compliant identification card, visit the Arizona Motor Vehicle Division's website at [azdot.gov/mvd](http://azdot.gov/mvd) to fill out an application and make an appointment at one of the agency's offices near you. You will need to provide one document for proof of birth, two documents for proof of address, and a Social Security number. Details are on the MVD website.

It is understood from federal officials that the Nation's current tribal ID will continue to be accepted at airports and also at border crossings for regular travel into and out of Mexico. However, it is recommended that tribal members carry multiple forms of photo ID with them at all times in the event that there is any confusion.. The Nation is also committed to developing Enhanced Tribal ID cards and is in the process of securing the necessary technology for adding RFID chips to the ID cards.

## ASU Honors Tohono O'odham Nation for Longtime Partnership

Chairman Jose and Vice Chairwoman Johnson represented the Tohono O'odham Nation at the ASU SPARKs Success awards dinner in Phoenix on April 15. The Nation was recognized for its many years of support for recruiting and retaining native students and faculty at ASU.

The Chairman and Vice Chairwoman were proud to accept this award on behalf of the Nation. They are committed to helping provide O'odham students and scholars with the resources they need to succeed at all three of Arizona's state universities, at community colleges, or at any other school of their choosing.

*Photos, clockwise from top right: 1) Chairman Jose at ASU's Mountain America Stadium for the awards event; 2) Chairman Jose and Vice Chairwoman Johnson with dignitaries including ASU Vice President of Tribal Relations Jacob Moore; 3) Chairman Jose addresses attendees at the awards ceremony, with Vice Chairwoman Johnson and Patrick Andrews, the Nation's Director of Education.*

