



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### Delegate Brown promotes the preservation of the Navajo language at the Utah Native American Summit



*Photo: Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown poses with delegation members who visited New Zealand to study and observe language and culture immersion programs of the Maori people.*

**OREM, Utah** – Last week during the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Utah Governor’s Native American Summit, Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) presented during one of the summit’s breakout sessions entitled “Our Life, Our Language: Nihe’iina’ Nihizaad.” The purpose of the session was to allow Utah tribal members to share their language and educational experience from their recent visit and interaction with the Maori Nation in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

In March, Delegate Brown and a delegation of Utah tribal scholars, professional, and tribal representatives visited Maori land to acquire knowledge on the revitalization methods to

preserve and promote the Maori language in their communities, specifically in their school system.

Delegate Brown said he was very impressed with the approach that the Maori Nation utilizes to ensure the survival of their language and culture, and hopes the same teaching principles can be applied to Navajo language classes.

“My reason for visiting New Zealand is to prevent the loss of our Navajo language and way of life. I heard amazing stories from the Maori people and how they keep their culture thriving. The Maori youth are amazing because they are proud of their language, the songs they were singing, and I want to bring that same method to the Navajo Nation,” said Delegate Brown.

He noted that when he was a candidate for the Navajo Nation Council, he ventured to the home of Navajo elders to hear what priorities they felt were important and found that a large majority requested that the Council begin working on preserving and teaching the Navajo language and culture.

Curleen Pfeiffer, volunteer and Navajo language teacher at the Pacific Heritage Academy, coordinated the visit to New Zealand and invited Utah tribal leaders and community members to witness the language and culture immersion programs in Maori schools.

“This is the third group that went down with me to New Zealand to learn the techniques on how the Maori teach children the language and culture from infant to adults. They were very close to losing their language, but now they are taught in their schools, even as far as the universities. The language is used to teach math, science, and other academic areas,” said Pfeiffer.

Delegate Brown said the experience he acquired from the Maori school’s language and culture curriculum has enabled him to begin reaching out to Navajo language and culture teachers, Ph. D students studying the Navajo language, medicine people, and Navajo youth to develop a subcommittee to increase the number of Navajo immersion schools on the Navajo Nation.

“This subcommittee would not be comprised of Council members, rather those who have the expert knowledge to make recommendations to Council to begin changing laws and policies to strengthen and increase Navajo immersion schools on Diné’tah,” said Delegate Brown. “I have high hopes to preserve our Diné language and way of life, and I believe we will be successful as we begin to move in that direction.”

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