

FIRST DRAFT

Socialism had a brief run in Junction's political realm

As a political movement, socialism was familiar to residents of Grand Junction before Socialist Thomas W. Todd was elected as mayor of the city in November, 1909.

In 1908, Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist Party of America nominee for president, had stopped in Grand Junction.

According to The Daily Sentinel, more than 1,000 people gathered at the Park Opera House to hear Debs speak, "one of the greatest audiences that ever turned out to hear a political speaker in Grand Junction."

Additionally, Debs was met at the railroad depot prior to his speech by "a large reception committee of local socialists," the Sentinel said. Apparently, the movement had many followers here.

Even so, when Grand Junction elected Todd as mayor in 1909, it was big news, here and around the country.

In January of 1910, a national magazine called Human Life published a lengthy article about Todd. The Sentinel reprinted the article the same month.

The article called Todd "a mayor without a party," because the city charter adopted by Grand Junction in September of 1909 didn't allow party affiliation for municipal elections.

That article didn't say Todd was a Socialist, only that he was known for "entertaining socialist views."

Referring to the city's preferential voting system, which allowed voters to mark their first, second and third choices for each municipal office, the Human Life article described Todd as "a third choice mayor elected to office not because he was the people's choice, but because he was third choice."

Although no party affiliation was allowed on the ballot or in campaign advertising, people clearly knew that Todd was affiliated with the Socialists.

But Todd was careful about that affiliation initially. A few weeks after the 1909 election, the Sentinel wrote, "There is sore disappointment among the socialists of this city," because "Mayor Todd will not tolerate any capital being made for the socialist party out of his election."

Although opposed to Socialism, the Sentinel didn't object to Mayor Todd's tenure at first. In fact, it supported some of his early actions.

By the end of Todd's second year in office, however, Sentinel editor Walter Walker had a different view.

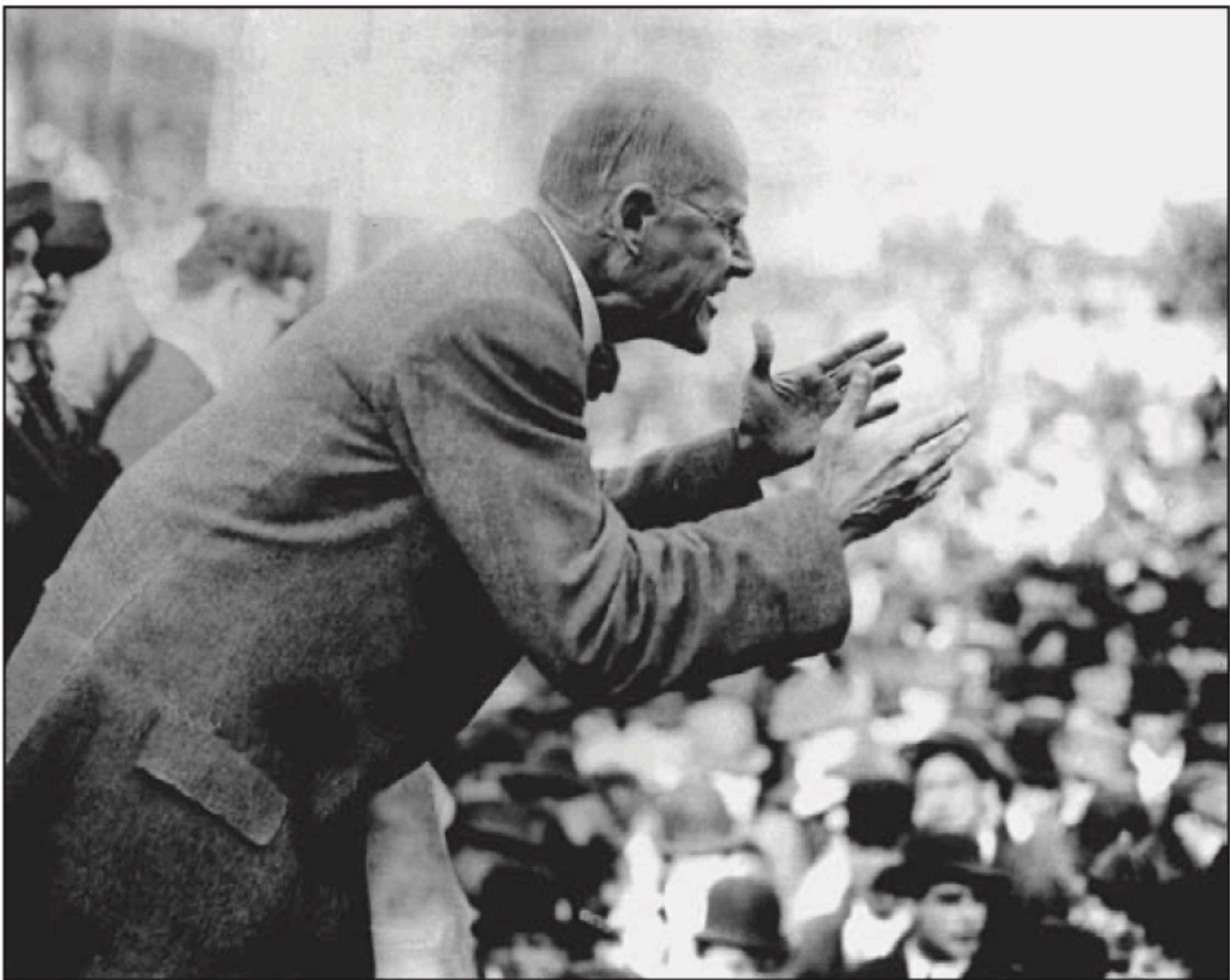
When Todd and the other city commissioners appointed Socialist Sheppard B. Hutchinson as police chief in late November, 1911, the Sentinel was not pleased.

"Police Chief is now a Socialist," a headline proclaimed on Dec. 1, 1911. The accompanying news article said Grand Junction had "the first and only socialist chief of police in the United States."

The newspaper objected strongly to a plan developed by Todd and Chief Hutchinson to create a municipal woodpile, where unemployed men could chop wood and earn food.

"Already the word has gone down the line that a man with a red card (a Socialist) can get a meal in the Junction for chopping a little wood," the paper reported on Dec. 18, 1911. "The woodyard is also to be used for unemployed men who are not socialists or hoboes."

When Todd and Hutchinson also sought to create a munic-



Perennial Socialist Party of America presidential candidate Eugene Debs speaks in Canton, Ohio, in 1918.

ipal icehouse that would offer free ice to anyone who needed it, the Sentinel opposed the plan.

When the city under Todd's mayorship then tried to gain control of the local electric company to make it a municipal utility and establish a city-owned coal mine for the benefit of workers, the Sentinel's opposition to Todd's tenure only grew.

Thomas Matthew Todd was born in Illinois in 1858. He married Alice Selfridge in 1879 in Weld County, Colorado. By 1896, the Todds were living in Payson, Utah, south of Spanish Fork, and Thomas was secretary of the local Populist Party.

The couple and their two sons had moved to Grand Junction by the spring of 1898, when the Sentinel listed Thomas Todd's occupation as beekeeper.

Sometime during the first years of the 20th century, Thomas Todd became owner or part owner of a lumber company that eventually became Mesa Lumber. He and his family were seen as well-to-do and lived in a large house on Main Street.

It's not clear when he shifted his alliance to the Socialist Party of America. But after his 1909 election, he began to gain national recognition.

By 1912, he was even considered as a running mate for Eugene Debs.

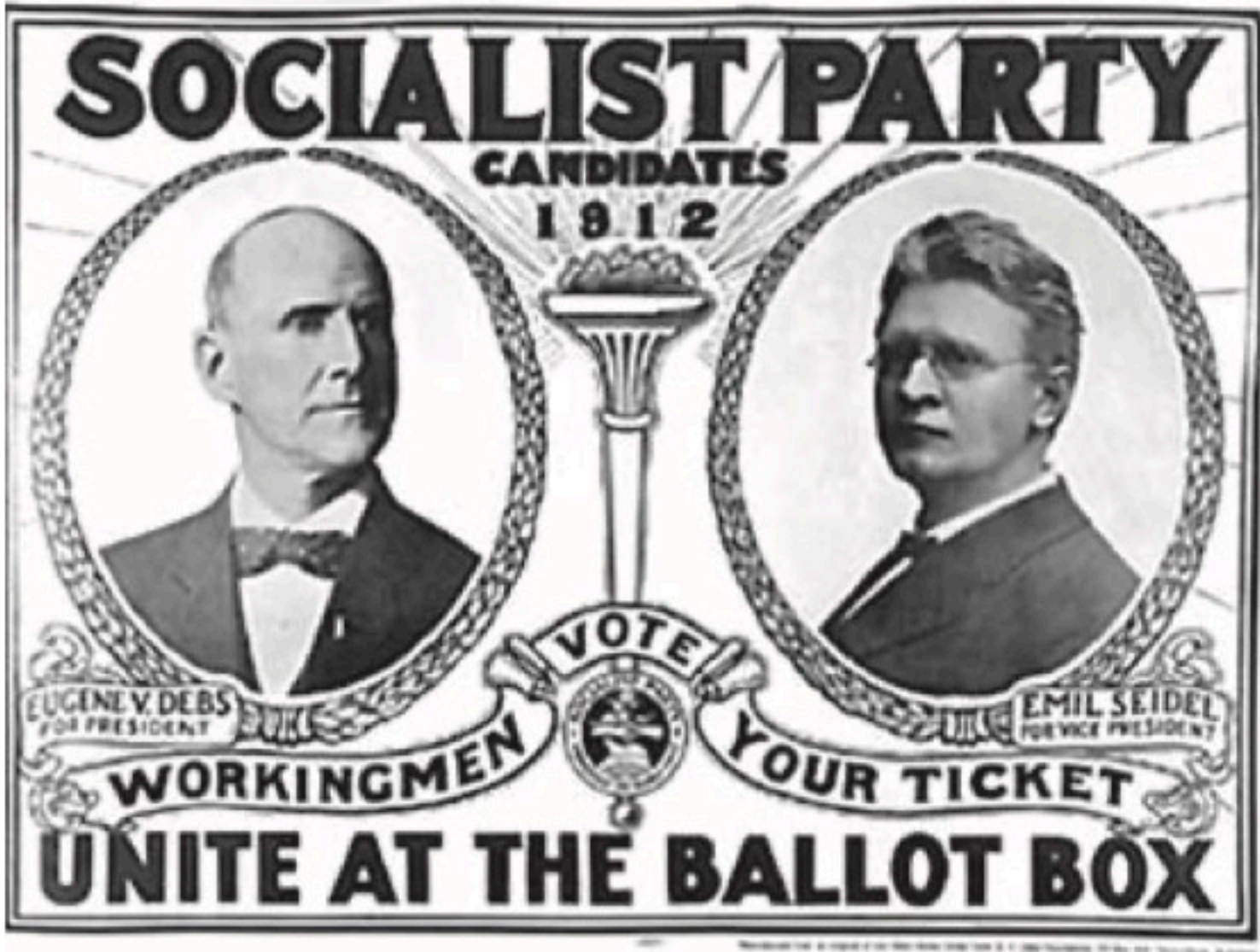
As he prepared to leave for the Socialists' national convention in Indianapolis in May of 1912, Todd told the Sentinel that he didn't expect to be nominated. But if he were, he said he would accept the post "more as a move to get publicity for this city than from any honor I will personally receive."

After the convention, the Sentinel reported that delegates from Colorado and Illinois had pushed Todd's candidacy for vice president. However, the former Socialist mayor of Milwaukee, Emil Seidel, won the nomination instead.

The relationship between Todd and the Sentinel reached its low point in April of 1913. That month, 140 representatives of the International Workers of the World, the radical labor union known as the Wobblies, arrived in town.

At the suggestion of Police Chief Hutchinson, Mayor Todd and the other city commissioners approved city funds to feed the Wobblies.

Walker was outraged and the Sentinel demanded the recall of both Todd and Hutchinson. Todd refused to budge, but Hutchinson opted to resign,



Grand Junction Mayor Thomas M. Todd was briefly considered as a vice presidential running mate for Eugene Debs in 1912. Instead, Emil Seidel, former mayor of Milwaukee, was selected.

and the recall effort stalled.

Todd decided not to seek re-election in November of 1913. The Sentinel lamented Todd's tenure as being detrimental to the city, but it refrained from attacking Todd personally.

"When we say this we are speaking of Thomas M. Todd as an official and as a Socialist, not as Thomas M. Todd personally," Walker wrote, "for we have nothing whatever against him other than a dislike for his pronounced Socialist policies."

By May of 1915, the feud had dissipated enough that the Sentinel cheered when Todd was elected president of the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce.

The Todds later moved back to Utah, and Alice Todd died in Salt Lake City in September, 1925.

Thomas eventually moved to California, where one of his two sons lived. He died in San Bernardino in 1946 at the age of 88.

Todd's political career reached its zenith in 1912, which proved to be one of the best years the Socialist Party of America had in electoral success. Eugene Debs won 6% of the popular vote that year, double what he won in any of his other four campaigns for president.

After 1912, Socialism's popularity in the United States began to decline. It made a brief comeback and peaked in 1924, with the presidential candidacy of Robert LaFollette. After that, Socialism was never the powerful political force that it had been at the beginning of the 20th century.

Still, for four years, it played a key role in Grand Junction's



THE DAILY SENTINEL AT NEWSPAPERS.COM

After the 1912 Socialist Party national convention, The Daily Sentinel reported that Grand Junction Mayor Thomas M. Todd had been the second choice of the party for vice president.

politics, led by a wealthy businessman turned Socialist who had been the third choice of the city's voters.

Sources: Historic copies of The Daily Sentinel at [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com); "Walter Walker and His Fight Against Socialism," by Jeannette Smith, Journal of the Western Slope, Fall, 1997; "When Grand Junction Had a Socialist Mayor," by Noel Kalenian, [www.mesacontylibraries.org](http://www.mesacontylibraries.org); research conducted by the Museums of Western Colorado.

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THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — Now that the House has approved the state's \$34 billion budget for the next fiscal year, which begins July 4, the measure heads back to the Senate for a final vote before heading to Gov. Jared Polis for his approval.

■ **Monday:** The House Agriculture, Livestock and Water Committee is to hear HB1260, a measure partly introduced by Rep. Marc Catlin, R-Montrose, and Sen. Kerry Donovan, D-Vail, that is to transfer \$20 million to begin to implement the state's water plan. The money comes from the voter-approved Proposition DD, which authorized online sports betting in the state.

■ **Tuesday:** The Senate Transportation and Energy Committee is to discuss SB 161, a measure partly sponsored by Sen. Don Coram, R-Montrose, to mandate the Colorado Public Utilities Commission to adopt rules for a voluntary greenhouse gas reduction program on natural gas use by large

utilities.

■ **Wednesday:** The House Judiciary Committee is to debate two law enforcement-related measures, HB1250 to address accountability, and HB1251 on when chemical restraints can be used.

■ **Thursday:** The Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee is to consider HB1223, a bill that would create the Outdoor Recreation Industry Office.

■ **Next week:** The Senate is to talk about a bill to create a Front Range Passenger Rail District for the purposes of planning, developing and financing a daily passenger rail service from Trinidad to Fort Collins.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Colorado Legislature's website at [leg.colorado.gov](http://leg.colorado.gov). Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

Navajo Nation reports no new virus deaths

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Navajo Nation is coming up on a week of reporting no additional deaths of the coronavirus on the vast reservation where safety precautions like a mask mandate and daily curfews remain.

The tribe on Friday reported no new deaths for the sixth consecutive day, and 13 new confirmed cases of COVID-19.

The latest numbers brought the pandemic totals to 30,355 cases, including four that had been belatedly reported, and 1,262 deaths.

So far, 16,475 people have recovered from COVID-19, tribal health officials said.

The tribe had been easing into reopening, but that slowed somewhat after coronavirus variants were confirmed on the reservation that stretches into New Mexico, Utah and Arizona. Tribal officials urged residents to stay vigilant.

Navajo President Jonathan Nez said the tribe recently had a cluster of cases as a result of a family gathering where people were not wearing masks. — AP

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