



## THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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# Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., reports establishment of command posts to deal with weather-related emergency

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., told the Navajo Nation Council that emergency command posts have been set up to coordinate with chapters to deal with the current weather-related state of emergency.

During his quarterly State of the Navajo Nation address today, President Shirley said the Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management is working in coordination with county, state and federal entities to bring needed relief to Navajos affected by deep snow, especially in remote areas.

“I’ve called upon each of our divisions within the Executive Branch to identify resources and personnel, even with our limited budgets, to help with the emergency efforts,” the President said. “We are in the process of identifying all available 4x4 trucks and SUVs, and I’ve authorized special assignment of general funded staff who are willing to assist by sorting, packaging and delivering provisions to our elders and others who are snowed in.”

The President said he was grateful to Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer for dedicating six National Guard helicopters to the Navajo Nation to conduct emergency evacuations and to provide relief to stranded individuals. He also thanked Classic Aviation of Page, Ariz., which conducted a volunteer flyover of Central and Fort Defiance agencies.

The President said Navajo Agricultural Products Industry has made 2,400 tons of feed and other products such as beans, flour and potatoes available for the emergency at significantly reduced prices. He said NAPI has allocated \$100,000 to transport these emergency relief items. He said Bashas’ and Lowes supermarkets donated food items to the central command center to keep the

emergency staff and volunteers fed as they perform critical communication and coordination functions.



*Navajo hogan is engulfed in snow in the central area of the Navajo Nation as a result of last week’s storms. Johnny Johnson Photo*

He said the Nation should expect the aftermath of flooding and mud to create more challenges to the relief effort.

The President reported that the Nation has received notice from the U.S. Department of Justice that the Navajo Nation was awarded \$74 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds for the construction of three judicial facilities.

He said the Navajo Nation Department of Corrections will use \$38.5 million to build a 64-bed, multi-purpose correctional facility in Tuba City, a \$31 million, 64-bed

detention facility in Kayenta, and \$3.8 million to construct a new adult correctional facility in Ramah.

He said the facilities will provide a deterrent to crime by removing dangerous criminals from Navajo communities and provide space for a range of culturally-appropriate services to inmates from pre-trial services, intervention and treatment, alternatives to incarceration, and services while individuals are serving their sentences.

He said the funds will help address the breakdown in the Navajo criminal justice system because of the lack of adequate facilities.

“These centers will provide an actual deterrent to crime instead of the current revolving door,” he said. “It is our hope that once fully operating, criminals will actually serve time for the crimes they commit, and we’ll see a reduction in the recidivism rate because of access to onsite rehabilitation services.”

Regarding energy development, he reported that on Sept. 25 the U.S. Environmental Appeals Board remanded the Desert Rock Energy Project’s air permit to Region 9 for reconsideration but that it was not unexpected and certainly does not mean the project has been cancelled.

“Desert Rock remains the most important economic development project in our Nation’s history,” he said. “It will provide thousands of good jobs for our people and fund almost one-third of the Navajo Nation’s annual operating budget. It is a key to our saving self, to ending our dependence on the federal government, and to regaining our independence as a Nation and a people.”

He said the recently-announced Big Boquillas Wind Project involves the Navajo Nation, the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, Edison Mission Energy, and Foresight Energy. NTUA negotiated arrangements with Edison Mission Energy and Foresight Energy so that NTUA, through the use of a for-profit affiliate, will be a 51 percent owner of the project, he said.

“Communities throughout the states of Arizona and New Mexico, such as Farmington, Flagstaff, Gallup, and Page, will purchase wind generation energy from the Navajo Nation,” he said. “These sales will directly benefit the Navajo Nation by reducing dependency on third parties and increasing the Nation’s self-sufficiency.”

After 40 years of inactivity and neglect, he said work has started to systematically address the rehabilitation and recovery of the 1.5 million acres of land known as the former Bennett Freeze Area in the Western Navajo Agency.

“The adverse impacts of the Bennett Freeze are tangible and certainly felt by everyone in the area,” he said. “The effects resulted in extensive substandard and deteriorated housing, deficiencies in infrastructure and public safety and health services. Deteriorating living conditions forced many Navajos to leave their traditional homeland and all opportunities for economic development were abandoned.”

In December 2006, the freeze was abolished by U.S. District Court Judge Earl Carroll. On April 21, 2009, Congress officially repealed the language that created the freeze.

The President said the Navajo Nation immediately began to address its recovery by planning for development and mitigation. To facilitate this process, he said, the Former Bennett Freeze Area Task Force was established to develop a strategic plan for the region.

The plan incorporates a physical survey of the entire area with a focus on housing, health facilities and schools, an analysis of needs based on current conditions and future population growth, a survey of residents’ priorities in the nine chapters within the area, and updates of each of the chapters’ land use plans, he said.

The President also expressed appreciation to Overstock.com CEO and founder Patrick Byrne for again donating \$25,000 to the Navajo Nation to purchase turkeys this past Christmas. He also thanked Dr. Dale Tingey of American Indian Services of Provo, Utah, for his donation to the Navajo Nation of knit hats, toys and Christmas candy.

He said Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley and staff of OPVP traveled across Navajoland to deliver the turkeys and toys to families in remote areas. The charitable undertaking was coordinated with the Community Health Representatives Program within the Division of Health, and the Navajo Division of Public Safety and the several officers volunteered time and resources to collect toys for the annual Toys for Tots activities.

“It is through selfless volunteer deeds like these that many needy Navajo children can experience the joy of receiving a gift at Christmastime, and many Navajo families can know the delight of a shared holiday meal. Caring for others in this way demonstrates the true meaning of the holiday season.”