



President Shirley's Message on Independence Day July 4, 2010

Y*a'at'eeb!* For 11 tumultuous years, from July 1776 until September 1787, the United States of America struggled to be born.

Beginning with the Declaration of Independence, through the nearly eight-year-long Revolutionary War that dangerously divided Americans, until the meticulous invention of the U.S. Constitution in Philadelphia in 1787, America searched for a way through political strife to the other side of true independence, sovereignty and the peace and prosperity one hopes it brings.

As we join other Americans today with reunions, barbeques, parades, rodeos and fireworks to celebrate this country's Declaration of Independence 234 years ago, the Navajo Nation finds itself in a similar struggle of rebirth as we re-invent our own government.

Like the American colonies of that time, the Navajo Nation is a young nation, working through a governmental structure imposed upon us by a stronger, dominant sovereign. Through the years, like the early Americans, Navajos have overcome their own political struggles and upheavals to make a complete government that reflects their thoughts, their way of life, and their own beliefs. However, the job is not done. It has only begun. We, as individuals, and we, as a government, have our shortcomings. But we know how to be better and we're striving to achieve it. As a People, we've always known the way to re-establish harmony and beauty all around us.

Like the Founding Fathers of the United States, many of us cling to the belief that the legitimacy and authority of our government stems from the consent of the governed, and that the government always has and always will belong to the People. With a population so large and growing, we may never all want or believe the same thing, or have unanimity in our political thoughts. Yet, as a People, we believe that our government should be for all of us, and that the will of the People should prevail.

Although politics in the chapter house, in the Council Chambers or at the ballot box may separate us, that is only temporary. Throughout time, there has always been more that unites us as Navajos than divides us, and it will always be so.

We may disagree on what is best. But beyond our differences, we are all Navajos. We all have clans. We all hold the same land sacred. We all respect those who came before and the teachings that they gave us. And we all feel the same emotion when we raise our voice to say, "I am proud to be Navajo!"

Two hundred and thirty four years ago, 56 patriots from 13 American colonial states placed their reputations, their wealth and their lives on the line to stand up to the tyrannical rule of Great Britain. King George III, his soldiers and his governors repeatedly abused their authority, oppressing American citizens into subservience, stealing the money that belonged to them, and squandering the wealth of the people.

John Adams and Benjamin Franklin led a five-member committee to draft a document of complaints and a declaration of independence from the Crown. The job of actually writing the document fell to a 33-year-old Virginian named Thomas Jefferson. From June 12 until June 27, 1776, Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence in an isolated rented room on the outskirts of Philadelphia.

Jefferson's declaration said that the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were bestowed upon men by the Creator. To secure these rights, men create governments, and the powers of government were derived through the consent of the governed.

"Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends," Jefferson wrote, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

Independence is the foundation of sovereignty and self-sufficiency. Few ideals are as precious to Navajos as our independence. As a people we have always been known as proud, fierce and independent. We have never hesitated to stand up for our inherent right to be independent and free. Our warriors have zealously guarded that freedom, whether they were defending the People in the 1850s, or they were young Navajo Code Talkers, soldiers, sailors and Marines of the 1940s, our young men and women who went to Korea, Vietnam, and Desert Storm, or our precious young now in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world in harm's way.

On this day of Independence, let us remember with our prayers, thoughts, and celebrations that it is we at home for whom they put their lives on the line to protect and preserve our Navajo way of life, all Native nations, and the United States, as patriots have done since 1776 and before.

Dr. Joe Shirley, Jr., President
THE NAVAJO NATION