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President Shelly and Vice President Jim Gives State of the Nation Address

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly showed unity today by showcasing the work Vice President Rex Lee Jim has been doing for the Navajo Nation during the first day of the Spring Session of the Navajo Nation Council.

During his time to give the State of the Nation address, President Shelly turned the floor over to Vice President Jim to deliver the quarterly State of the Nation.

“I want to introduce Vice President Rex Lee Jim, and he will give the Nation address for us,” said President Shelly at the onset of the allotted 20-minute time limit.

Vice President Jim spoke for nearly 20 minutes and delivered the State of the Nation almost entirely in Navajo.

Though Vice President Jim spoke mostly in Navajo, he followed the English written State of the Nation, and his speech outlined some of the initiatives the administration and Vice President Jim have accomplished and are working toward.

For the educational issues of the Navajo Nation, Vice President Jim updated the Council about the administration’s support of Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon’s “Navajo Nation Sales Tax Distribution Reform Act of 2012,” and two updates about Navajo Head Start.

According to the written State of the Nation, the administration coordinated with Council Delegate Witherspoon to help the coordinate a plan that could raise \$8 million for scholarships, and economic development and natural resource protections. Raising the Navajo sales tax by one percent would generate the revenue.

The money would be split with Navajo scholarships receiving half a percent the new sales tax revenue, while the other half percent would go to the economic development and natural resources policy development.

“Honorable Witherspoon’s legislation secures an investment into our future. Just as our parents and grandparents cared for us, we must do the same for our children. It is now our time to provide for our children,” according to the State of the Nation.

Also, Vice President said that Navajo Head Start was able to keep its funding level of about \$29 million as a result of “government to government” consultations with Head Start Director Yvette Sanchez Fuentes and Acting Secretary for the Administration of Children and Families.

The February meeting ended with the Navajo Nation being able to keep funding in tact with three years to revamp the Navajo Head Start program and bring them into compliance with federal standards.

Last year, Head Start announced Navajo Head Start faced possible cuts from funding by nearly 50 percent.

Also, Navajo Head Start hired Community Development Institute to help rebuild the program.

Vice President Jim announced another Head Start project that is nearing its fruition.

The Shiyazhi Diné K'ehji Hadoozih' curriculum would teach Navajo language to home-based Navajo Head Start students.

The program plans to make use of booklets, activity booklets and provide home-based teachers an instructional guide. The curriculum is finishing the graphic design portion and then will be printed, Vice President Jim said in Navajo.

Vice President Jim also announced the successful passage of a waiver that saved Indian Health Service and 638 contract health centers as much as \$24 million in Medicaid and Medicare funding.

Due to a \$1 billion deficit, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer proposed state Medicare and Medicaid cutbacks, but provided a waiver for American Indian tribes in Arizona. The federal government approved her waiver for the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS).

“This waiver also means keeping the doors of health care open for 50,000 Navajo people enrolled in AHCCCS,” according to the written speech.

Vice President Jim updated the Council about a planned 2012 Navajo Nation Food Policy Summit, in which health leaders would explore solutions with a food policy to address obesity on the Navajo Nation.

The Navajo Department of Health estimates that 40 percent of Navajo people are obese, and obesity is a contributing factor for heart attacks, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic diseases.

The summit would bring in Navajo culture into the discussion, and explore the spiritual and nutritional role in a historical perspective while using more current data, Vice President Jim said.

Toward the end of the speech, Vice President Jim talked about the Navajo-Hopi Little Colorado River Water Settlement Act of 2012, which has gained national attention.

The act would settle claims of the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe pertaining to the Little Colorado River Basin.

Critics have stated that the settlement has too many water claims waivers. Meanwhile, the Congressional act would provide the Navajo Nation more than \$200 million for water infrastructure development for areas in the southern and southwestern portion of the Navajo Nation.

In addition, while the Navajo Nation would gain unlimited usage of the Coconino Aquifer, critics have said the water isn't quantified in the proposed agreement.

Regardless, the Vice President Jim announced that forums about the proposed settlement would begin on Tuesday.

“We are going to present facts and settling water claims is a tough proposition, but we must think about the alternative of no settlement, which includes having the Arizona state court deciding our water rights for us,” said Vice President Jim.

In conjunction with the Navajo Nation Water Rights Commission, the Office of the President and Vice President are holding water settlement forums in seven communities directly affected by the settlement.

The forums are scheduled to begin on April 17 in Tuba City.

The Vice President Jim closed with a statement about leadership.

Using the written speech, Vice President Jim said “our people are our strength, and we, as leaders, must lead our people to greater prosperity and opportunities, while keeping our culture alive and strong.”

The President and Vice President's report passed nine to five.

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