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Vice President Jim delivers State of the Navajo Nation Shares information on The Five Pillars of Nation Building



Navajo Nation Vice President Rex Lee Jim opened the 22nd Navajo Nation Council 2014 Winter Session with the State of the Navajo Nation address. Vice President Jim shared data from the five pillars of nation building during his presentation. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

On Jan. 27, 2014, Navajo Nation Vice President Rex Lee Jim delivered the State of the Navajo Nation address to the 22nd Navajo Nation Council for the start of the 2014 Winter Session.

Flanked by Navajo Nation Chief of Staff Arbin Mitchell and Division of Economic Development Director Albert Damon, Vice President Jim reported on “The Five Pillars of Nation Building: Providing Stability and Accountability for the Future of the Navajo Nation.”

Beginning with an overview of the Navajo Nation’s finances when the Shelly-Jim administration took office in Jan. 2011, the vice president said much progress has been made on behalf of the Navajo people.

“The Navajo Nation was in the red and we rolled up our sleeves and took ownership of the daunting task of bringing economic solvency back to the Nation,” he said. “Today, we are happy to report that the Nation is in the black and the Undesignated Unreserved Fund Balance now has over \$8 million in its coffers to provide resources for any unforeseen emergencies.”

Vice President Jim explained that the fund balance was the result of exercising the line item veto authority to keep the Nation’s fiscal house in order. He said although the measures

were unpopular, the Shelly-Jim administration took a hardline approach to the dark clouds of federal sequestration and decreasing royalties looming over the Nation.

“We must think outside the box and find progress in the oldest of Navajo philosophies: T’áá hwó ájít éego,” he said.

Vice president said through self-sufficiency, the Shelly-Jim administration found success in the five pillars of infrastructure development; economic prosperity and job creation; healthy lives; open and accountable government; and educational opportunities. He noted these were collaborative efforts with the 22nd Navajo Nation Council.

Infrastructure Development

Under the first pillar of infrastructure development, he said Navajo Division of Transportation (NDOT) remained committed to paving a solid infrastructure for the Nation’s 14,733 miles of road. Seventy-six percent, or 11,352 miles, are unpaved.

The reality of paving these roads is an expensive task, he said, and that NDOT entered into partnerships with counties in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah to address these priorities.

In Nov. 2013, NDOT’s partnership with Sandoval County for the Torreon Road rehabilitation effort was the only TIGER grant project selected for the state of N.M.

Vice President Jim said, “This \$3.3 million project has improved over seven miles of road, which was previously potholed and dangerous for travelers, especially school children riding on the bus.”

He also highlighted the Division of Health’s (DOH) infrastructure development efforts for health care facilities in Bodaway-Gap, Dilkon, Gallup, Kayenta and Pueblo Pintado. All five projects are on the Indian Health Service national priority listing.

The Kayenta Health Center is under construction and received \$96.6 million in federal funding, \$18.6 million of which was received in the past quarter. At a completion rate of 65 percent, the project has stimulated the local economy and job market, with an 80 to 90 percent Navajo workforce, including many in top positions.

Economic Prosperity and Job Creation

For the second pillar of economic prosperity and job creation, the vice president said Division of Economic Development (DED) played a major role in the past quarter, especially the Smith Electric licensed

manufacturing effort.

The United Kingdom-based electric car manufacturing company is seeking international expansion for licensed manufacturers and the Nation stands poised as a licensee under the holding company Dine' Development Corporation, he said.

Another division made significant progress in the first quarter of 2014.

Efforts from DOH, through the Office of Uranium Workers, assisted Navajo uranium miners, millers ore transporters, downwinders and their survivors with benefits from the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). The RECA claims for a collective of 10 individuals resulted in \$1,045,000 in compensation over the past quarter.

On Oct. 24, 2013, the division also signed a memorandum of agreement with the Nation, City of Gallup, and McKinley County for the Gallup Detoxification Center. The agreement provided the foundation for the Department of Behavioral Health Services to operate the center and continue services to individuals suffering from alcohol and substance abuse disorders.

Healthy Lives

From Oct. 20 to 26, 2013, Vice President Jim spearheaded "Running for a Stronger and Healthier Nation" at various chapters across the Navajo Nation. The event had 200 runners, 1,500 walkers and over 2,000 community members receiving health education.

"I ran a majority of the route to promote wellness among Navajo people," he said.

Through gang and drug interdiction efforts, the Division of Public Safety also contributed toward the Nation's health and welfare over the past quarter. The Drug and Gang Unit conducted 40 drug and alcohol distribution operations across the Nation and seized five cannabis plants, 600 grams of processed marijuana, 45-ounces of methamphetamines, oxycodone pills, and arrested 27 individuals under federal distribution and possession charges. The street value of the seized contraband was \$10,000.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife was another major player in the health of the Nation through disposal of 3,913 animals, investigation of 118 animal bite cases, investigation of 87 incidents of livestock damage, 321 rabies vaccinations, and an animal sweep at NHA Ojo Amarillo housing resulting in 57 animal impoundments and 13 animal control citations for failure to restrain animals.

Open and Accountable Government

Division of Community Development's (DCD) efforts to decentralize the Local Governance Support Centers (LGSC) was at the head of the table over the past quarter for the pillar of open and accountable government.

The Budget and Finance Committee issued a directive on July 5, 2013 to decentralize the LGSC offices and was memorialized through Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CS-47-13. DCD was allocated \$3 million for the formation of a task group and planning for the decentralization endeavor.

"The plan is to decentralize the five LGSC offices into 16 Administrative Service Centers that will provide chapters with legal services, financial accounting, capacity building for Local



Delegate Dwight Witherspoon said he supported the Local Governance Support Center decentralization effort. He brought up concerns with legal assistance at the chapters, water, roads, taxation and support for establishing the Navajo Department of Health. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Another delegate, Nelson BeGaye, had said the \$8 million surplus in the Undesignated Unreserved Fund Balance needs to be spent and not just sit in the account for unforeseen emergencies. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



The gallery of the council chamber fluctuated throughout the day, with many waiting impatiently for council legislation that required two-thirds majority vote of the membership. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

Governance Act certification, and assistance with planning, completion, operation and maintenance of chapter projects,” Vice President Jim reported.

The Navajo Nation General Leasing Act was another major step toward open and accountable government, allowing the Nation true self-determination in exercising leasing authority over home sites, grazing, business sites and more. This legislation is currently under review by the Secretary of the Interior and upon approval, will streamline the bureaucratic processes of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Vice president said the Navajo Land Title Data System works hand-in-hand with the Act and is another effort from the Navajo Land Department. The new database streamlines tribal processes through technology.

Educational Opportunities

The Division of Dine’ Education took the lead role for this pillar and provided outreach to all five agencies of the nation through after school programs, tutoring services and field trips focused on physical activities.

“We encourage Dine’ bizaad and incorporating our language and culture into the education of our children. This is important because it provides our kids with self-identity through Ke’ and our parents and grand parents must be proactive in this effort,” Vice President Jim said. “The future of our Navajo Nation depends on it.”

Another major initiative was the delivery of books from the Reader-to-Reader Organization to the Navajo Nation Library in Oct. 2013. The library in turn distributed 2,000 books to the Office of the First Lady, 6,501 books to St. Michaels Indian School, 120 books to Hopi Junior and Senior High School, 621 books to Jeddito School, 122 books to St. Bonaventure Mission School, 100 books to Navajo Pine High School, 175 books to Thoreau Community Center and 2,000 books to Chinle Head Start. The library added 7,888 books to their shelves.

The vice president reiterated the success of the five pillars for the Nation.

“These five pillars have provided stability to the Nation and we will continue to build upon this foundation for the years to come. We will continue to work with the Navajo Nation Council to bring these important projects to reality,” he said.



Vice President Jim said the Executive and Legislative Branches must work together in order to achieve goals and objectives for the Navajo Nation. No one branch, division, department or program can do it alone, he said. “We must work together,” Vice President Jim said. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Delegate Josh Butler said he did not understand the need for assessments in the former Bennet Freeze area. He said he supported the decentralization efforts in addition to the development of the Navajo Department of Health. (Photo by Rick Abasta)