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For Immediate Release
July 18, 2011

President Ben Shelly Delivers State of the Navajo Nation Address at the NNC's Summer Session

Window Rock, AZ—President Ben Shelly delivered the State of the Navajo Nation Address from the chambers of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council's Summer Session today, July 18, 2011.

The following text is from President Shelly's 2011 State of the Navajo Nation Address:

Speaker Johnny Naize, Chief Justice Herb Yazzie, Delegates of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council, Vice President Jim, relatives and honored guests, *Ya'at'eeh*.

Honorable members of the Council, let us acknowledge every Navajo hero who has served our Nation with courage and dedication. Let us remember and honor our Navajo warriors who continue to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan to defend our freedom. At home, let us say thank you to our first responders, our police officers, and our firefighters. The Nation also remembers Police Sergeant Darrell C. Curley who made the ultimate sacrifice while making our communities safer. Through his love for his community, he upheld his oath to protect our people. We honor his bravery and the sacrifice of his loved ones who saw him depart. The commitment of our everyday heroes reaffirms our role as leaders. My wife Martha and I are grateful everyday for their service.

As seen in the Great Seal of our Nation, everything on Mother Earth is greeted by early morning sunlight in the east. Each dawn is a new day on Navajo land and the warmth given by the sun is prosperity. Though we face challenging times, we are a strong people. History has taught us that during our most difficult experiences, our leaders, our forefathers gathered together to make hard decisions. We must be worthy of the trust that we have been given by the people, and we must be honest with them. Our sense of purpose is clear and that is for us all to work together.

For the last seven months, Vice President Jim and I have visited several communities and shared mutton stew and fry bread with many families. Listening to their concerns and their ideas, I am here to report that the people are hopeful for the future of the Navajo Nation. Our people speak of a return to a simple life when we worked together to solve common issues. They also asked for positive change and a new direction in leadership. This includes government decentralization in Window Rock and a call for their

leaders to also listen to their story at their dinner table.

Our mothers ask for safer schools and want to know how to start a small business. Our younger fathers seek additional vocational training to develop their skills so that they can compete for higher-paying management jobs. Grandfathers want access to cleaner drinking water for their horses, sheep, and cattle. Many want an end of illegal trash dumping at the local wash. Grandmothers want Navajo history and government taught in all classrooms. Many want their chapter officials to be more accountable with chapter funds. Our young people do not want to be told they are not qualified when applying for tribal jobs. All across the Navajo Nation there is optimism, there are new ideas, and there is hope.

As we continue to reinvent our government we must move in a direction toward financial responsibility and financial independence. This year, we have a \$170 million dollar revenue projection and though it may look like we have more money to spend, the reality is that the Navajo Nation Government has a \$22 million dollar deficit. This debt affects our economic potential. When we speak of job creation and developing businesses, we also have to set the example by paying off our \$22 million dollar debt. Speaker Naize, Chief Justice Yazzie, and I are in agreement on paying down the Unreserved Undesignated Fund Balance (UUFB).

By law, we have to get the Unreserved Undesignated Fund Balance out of the red and make every attempt to stabilize the Nation's budget so we can get back on our feet. Things are not going to be easy. This transition will be hard. In Washington, Congress and President Barack Obama are calling for a \$2-4 billion dollar cut to next years federal budget. This potential budget cut will impact everyone across America especially Indian Country. So it is critical that we be responsible stewards of the people's money and change how we conduct business in Window Rock. As leaders, we must show fiscal responsibility and think about the future of our 300,024 Navajos. We cannot operate a Nation when it is in a deficit and we cannot speak of creating jobs when we are in the red. I challenge the Council to honor its fiscal responsibility to the Navajo people.

Vice President Jim and I are committed to restructuring the executive branch and as I promised in my first address, I created the Executive Branch Reorganization Taskforce to address cost containment among our divisions. As many of you have heard in the past few months, the people are asking, "*Are our leaders spending our money wisely? How is Window Rock going to respond to local issues?*" I heard this call for fiscal control and decentralization and have directed all divisions to scrutinize their own finances. Our plan is to pull together resources from across the executive branch and do more with less. That should be the attitude of our leaders and the outlook of the entire Navajo government. We will end the old ways of how we used to function. It starts with identifying problem areas, merging departments and programs, removing duplication of services, and downsizing.

We are using our executive branch budget as a mechanism to streamline and cut wasteful spending. Across the Nation we have concerned community members who believe the government should decrease travel costs of tribal employees. I agree with them and I implemented further off-reservation travel restrictions in April. We are cutting back and continue to do more with less.

Alongside the communities of Ganado and Beclabito, the people have asked that services be local. Recently, a young single mother from Church Rock, who spent 30 years off the Nation, received her doctoral degree and applied for a position with the government. Like many others who return home to

help, she was told she was not -qualified with any experience. The people are demanding that we hire the best-qualified applicants for tribal jobs. Under the leadership of the Division of Human Resources and the Reorganization Taskforce, we are completing an overall evaluation of the Nation's personnel polices and procedures.

As part of those proposed revisions, I have also directed certain division directors to participate in a pilot project where divisions can determine for themselves who is the most qualified individuals for their open positions. This will no longer be a lengthy, overbearing process for our applicants. The Department of Personnel Management will hand over more responsibility to the divisions, where it should be. I have heard the frustration of parents who want their children to return home after completing their college education. Our administration will continue to encourage qualified, forward-driven professionals like this hard working mother from Church Rock to work for our people here at home. We need new ideas and innovative ways of thinking. Our returning college students have this experience and energy.

On Friday, Vice President Jim and I directed a task team and the Department of Diné Education to begin the administrative process of preparing and negotiating for an increase to proposed funding cuts by the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Head Start. As proposed, we are faced with a reduction in our base Head Start grant by 48%. When first established, the Navajo Head Start was funded to serve 4,073 children and since 2001, the program has never been fully enrolled. For the past several years, Head Start's enrollment has varied between 2,000-2,500 children due to lack of facilities and staffing.

We expect to receive additional recommendations and begin taking action to correct issues by the end of July. Our priority is to ensure that direct services to our children and families are not disrupted. I have directed Navajo Head Start to develop a detailed budget plan to address the proposed funding cuts so we can begin negotiating for a higher rate of cost per child. Navajo Head Start staff face unique challenges because of remote classroom locations, travel expenses and the ability to effectively conduct home visits. It is important to the Vice President and I that we continue to provide our children with every opportunity to be successful in the classroom.

Members of the Council, I firmly believe that our future as a strong Nation can be evaluated by our investment into the future of our young people. In a dedicated effort to recruit young professionals to work for the administration, Vice President Jim and I created the President's Program for Leadership and Service. This volunteer internship program provides a unique opportunity our young people to learn about their government. The Vice President and I serve as mentors to our students. This program is a positive step to bring more young people back to work for the Nation.

After hearing from our elders, youth, and parents, I have decided to begin the 65th Annual Navajo Nation Fair with a Youth Summit to hear their ideas, concerns, and solutions. We are planning a Facebook Youth Town Hall as well, utilizing technology and the Internet to connect with young Navajo people across the country. The time has come where we have to reach out to our youth and begin to bridge this gap between the old and young. As leaders, we have a responsibility to listen, and through our wisdom, we can begin to mentor these future leaders to take on our roles as we depart.

Next to youth, we are working to do more for our veterans who returned from the battlefield. As stated in my last address, I have tasked our administration to gather the ideas from our warriors and their

families. Our commitment led us to Oak Springs, Crownpoint, Kaibeto, and Dennehotso where we hosted four Veterans Town Hall meetings. For too long, Window Rock has made decisions without consulting with our veterans. We brought our people together and asked them what they wanted changed.

Over the next few months, we will move toward establishment of the Division of Veterans Affairs, which will serve as a one-stop shop for veterans services, including substance abuse counseling, housing assistance, and culturally appropriate case management. Next to this this commitment, I call upon the members of the Council to support the creation of a Title 27 to the Navajo Nation Code and a proposed Navajo Veteran's Act. We envision an act that recognizes our veteran organizations, the streamlining of the home-site lease process, and the establishment of proper protocol when honoring veterans. Our veterans are a top priority for the executive branch and we need to stand together.

At home our law enforcement face many challenges. With a Nation that is the size of the State of West Virginia, we have only one police officer assigned to protect 1000 Navajo people. This one police officer is assigned to patrol 187 square miles each day. This leaves communities vulnerable to crime. To help address this, we must increase the budget for the Division of Public Safety to provide more qualified and trained police officers. It is important that we take care of our own and move resources towards public safety. It will take the support of all three branches to invest additional funds toward law enforcement. Our officer's lives are on the line and they need new vehicles, updated equipment, and the latest technology to keep up with challenges we face.

Our administration continues to practice the 'Buy Navajo' approach where we support Navajo-friendly and Navajo-owned businesses. There are existing laws that continue to create hurdles for small business development and we must change them. A potential business owner should have every opportunity to start up a business here on Navajo land. It should be easy to start a small business next door.

We are making good on our commitment to creating jobs. As we have said before we want the business environment to grow through Navajo-owned and operated businesses, industry, and manufacturing. In May, we attended a signing ceremony in Fort Defiance, where a Navajo-owned business and their partner signed an agreement to manufacture solar panels. Proudly, all panels will bear the Navajo company name and read, "Made in The Navajo Nation, USA." If we continue to work together, we will have the potential to create 450 new Navajo jobs by the end of this year. This is only the beginning and our economic aspects for the Nation is brighter. This is called economic prosperity.

With our natural resources, we have the capacity to create new jobs from renewable energy sources, both wind, solar, and geo-thermal. Under the leadership of the Energy Advisory Committee (EAC), we continue to update and coordinate the development of our vast energy portfolio. I am pleased to report that a Navajo Energy Policy has been completed. This administration has hosted several public hearings across the Nation and the next step is to compile all input we have received from the public and address their concerns. Further, we plan to host several town halls this quarter to discuss the draft energy policy with the people.

Members of the Council, earlier this year I signed an executive order to support a smoke free environment for all public and work places on the Navajo Nation. Wellness is important to our well-being and survival as a Nation. We are against all forms of commercial tobacco use and exposure to

secondhand smoke. We know the harm tobacco causes. It claims more lives every year than any other sickness. Heart disease, lung cancer, and C.O.P.D. cause death. The 17th U.S. Surgeon General said to me that primary and secondhand smoke causes disease and premature death. Vice President Jim and I firmly believe that all Navajo workers should be able to breath clean air and work in an environment free of commercial tobacco smoke.

I am respectfully asking you to table proposed resolution 240-11, which is incomplete and not entirely smoke-free. This is not a matter of reduced revenue. That is what the tobacco industry tells you. They know there is big profit in commercial tobacco. Think of the years to come, the long-term picture. Working together, we can take a strong stand for the health of our Navajo families. I am not going to compromise the health of our children and grandparents. We are going to do it right once and get it done with the support of the people.

At times here in Window Rock, we have to remind ourselves of our communities and the simple, modest lives of our people. We remind ourselves that our people depend on us to create greater opportunities. Our people do not need additional handouts and government should not be running businesses. Our people want safer roads, water and utility lines, and local businesses they can support so they don't have to rely on a border town to shop for groceries. Our people are everywhere and they are speaking up. We must listen to their call.

Our course is set for a new direction. The sun rises again for another day. Our journey is by horseback and we will travel far. Joined by a common purpose, we gather in this chamber to make decisions future generations will judge us by. Our vision is solid and our expectations are bold.

We are one people, moving forward together, as one Nation. Our future is prosperous for we are all related as one Navajo family.

Honorable members of the Navajo Nation Council, thank you and may the Holy People continue to bless the Great Navajo Nation.

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