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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., First Lady Vikki Shirley call for sharing DUI info with states, announce domestic violence training

President proclaims Child Abuse Prevention, Alcohol Awareness months on Navajo

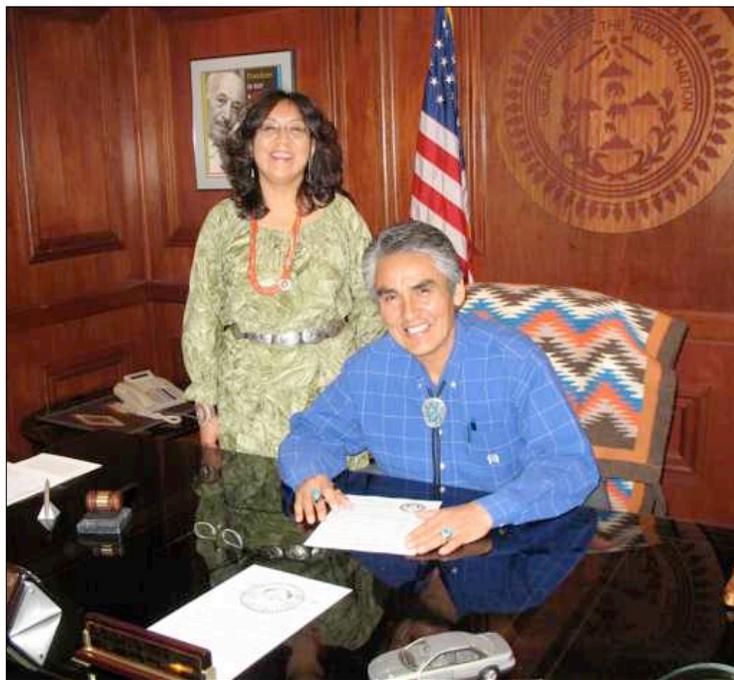
WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and First Lady Vikki Shirley have urged the Navajo Nation Council to adopt the Intergovernmental Traffic Offense Data Act of 2006 in its coming session that begins Monday.

The legislation, sponsored by Upper Fruitland Council Delegate LoRenzo Bates, establishes a protocol for sharing driving records, including DUI offenses, with state law enforcement agencies. Like the Shirleys, Mr. Bates is a powerful voice against drunk driving and underage drinking.

In a joint press conference here Wednesday, the President also signed two proclamations, one to declare April as Child Abuse Prevention Month and the other to declare April as Alcohol Awareness Month on the Navajo Nation.

Navajo Division of Public Safety officials were on hand to announce the start of the Navajo Nation Police Academy's Domestic Violence Prevention Training program that will be required for all officers. The program begins April 26.

President Shirley said that since the start of his Administration, he's advocated sharing of driving information with the Navajo Nation's neighboring states as a way to reduce the carnage left by driving under the influence. As it is now, a Navajo driver with DUI convictions on the Navajo Nation might not have that information show up on his driving record off the Navajo Nation.



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., and First Lady Vikki Shirley urged the Navajo Nation Council to adopt the Intergovernmental Traffic Offense Data Act of 2006 during a press conference in the President's office Wednesday. The President signed two proclamations to declare April Child Abuse Prevention Month and Alcohol Awareness Month on the Navajo Nation.

"I want to send word out to Mr. Speaker (Lawrence T. Morgan, Speaker of the Navajo Nation Council) to do everything they can to pass that legislation," the President said.

He said because of the large size of the Navajo Nation and its government, all three branches need to work together to solve these critical social problems.

"We really need to crack the whip, really crack down on these evils," the President said.

Mrs. Shirley echoed the President's concern.

"As chair of the Navajo Nation DUI Task Force, we also support Council Delegate Bates' legislation," she said. "We want to ask Speaker Morgan and the council delegates out there, telling them we do need this support. We ask for (the council's) vote and ask that they do please consider this legislation for the safety of our people."

In 2001, the Shirleys lost a daughter, 29-year-old Tona Vee Shirley-Paymella, the mother of four, to a drunk driver. They credit the national organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving with helping their family through the crushing pain of that period. Since then, President Shirley has served on MADD's national advisory board and Mrs. Shirley has spearheaded the formation of the Navajo Nation-wide MADD Chapter and serves as chairman of the Navajo Nation MADD-DUI Task Force. She speaks frequently of the dangers and resultant pain of drunk driving and pitches in at numerous police alcohol checkpoints to educate the public about DUI and the need for seat belt use.

The incidence of DUI across Navajoland has risen steadily in the last three years, according to Navajo Police statistics. In 2003, police made 2,643 DUI arrests. That rose to 2,820 in 2004 and 3,310 last year.

Reporting on the new Domestic Violence Prevention Training being instituted by the Navajo Police Department, Samson Cowboy, director of the Navajo Division of Public Safety, said the division acknowledges it has inadequately treated the victims of domestic violence through the years.

The training is designed to educate police officers to investigate domestic violence as well as stalking, cyberstalking, strangulation, child abuse, sexual assaults and rape.

"We're tired of making excuses," Mr. Cowboy said. "We're stepping forward in public safety."

He and Navajo Police Chief Jim Benally, who attended the press conference with Mr. Cowboy and other officers, informed their staff two months ago of the department's new zero tolerance policy for domestic violence. Mr. Cowboy said two or three officers from each district will soon be assigned to investigate nothing by domestic violence cases.



Navajo Division of Public Safety Director Samson Cowboy (in blue shirt) speaks to the press on Wednesday in the President's office. The Navajo Police Department announced its zero tolerance policy for domestic violence within the department and the beginning of its Domestic Violence Prevention Training Program at the Navajo Police Academy at Toyey April 26. Attending from left to right is Navajo Times reporter Bill Donovan, Sgt. Daren Simeona, Navajo Police Chief Jim Benally, Mr. Cowboy, OPVP staff assistant Arlene Shorty, Lynette Willie with the Department of Behavioral Health, Judge Ray Gilmore, Navajo Times reporter Marley Shebala, Gallup Independent report John Christian Hopkins, Sgt. Raymond Joe, ADABI DV program director Lorena Halwood and First Lady Vikki Shirley.

ADABI assists victims of Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault For help, call 928-674-8314

For the year 2005, ADABI assisted **377** women, **5** males, **797** children.
More than half of the children were boys.

189 were referred from different resources in the community, most through
the Chinle Hospital ER after hours, weekends, and holidays.

307 were verbally abused

285 were physically abused.

156 were sexually abused.

42 of the victims were using alcohol or drugs.

197 of the abusers were using alcohol or drugs during the time of the incident.

100+ children were abused,

113 of the victims were abused as children.

149 of the abusers were abused as children.

Police officers responded during past incidents and 71 abusers
were arrested.

123 responded to the call and 54 abusers were arrested.

ADABI assisted with 99 protection orders with 37 filing charges against their abusers.

ADABI transported 57 women with 141 children to shelters.

48 women with 104 children stayed in safe homes.

113 women with 242 went to Other Safe Places.

“We’re going around telling our staff during inspection that domestic violence will not be tolerated,” Mr. Cowboy said. “We are taking some steps internally. It’s got to start internally to start enforcing some of these domestic issues.”

He noted that while there are federal and state laws against domestic violence, there is no Navajo Nation law on the books.

Sgt. Daren Simeona, a domestic violence prevention instructor at the Navajo Police Academy at Toyei, said officers were deeply touched after completing a federal law enforcement domestic violence course.

“Domestic violence, sexual abuse and child abuse is enormously high on the reservation,” Sgt. Simeona said. “It’s really an epidemic that we need to put a stop to.”

He added that officers returned from training with the conviction to make an impact and to help domestic violence victims rather than treat them as if their situation is not serious.

“The training was so intense,” he said. “It made me realize that over my 20 years, we weren’t doing a good job. Family’s the key thing to unity in the community and the country and the government.”

He said because of the vast size of the Navajo Nation, the incidence of domestic violence is twice the national rate. If homicides of Navajo women were re-investigated, he estimated that half would turn out to be domestic homicides.

“We all, including myself, have to do 1,000 times better,” he said. “We must join forces with everyone else who is fighting to stop violence against women. We want the police officers to leave our training with a conviction that they will go out and make a point to help a victim, investigate each incident with a purpose and provide the services they duly need.”

Up to now, he said, the Navajo police has investigated domestic violence as if it was a nuisance rather than a crime. He said he shocked Lorena Halwood, the domestic violence program coordinator at ADABI – *Ama Doo Alchini Bighan, Inc.* – when he asked her to assist in teaching the academy course. ADABI is a 19-year-old, non-profit, 24-hour women’s crisis program with offices in Chinle and Tsaile.

Ms. Halwood said that while girls still commonly have a *kinalda* ceremony where they learn about womanhood and their responsibilities, boys no longer seem to receive instruction from their uncles in the sweat lodge at puberty. Domestic violence, she added, is a learned behavior.

Sgt. Raymond Joe of the Navajo Domestic Violence Task Force and a domestic violence prevention instructor, said Navajo police acknowledged that hundreds, possibly thousands, of Navajo women have been hurt by the department's misunderstanding and neglect of the widespread problem.

"It is now understood that police officers are victims and predators of domestic violence, and this required training will address the problem," he said.

Mrs. Shirley said that as a member of Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano's and New Mexico First Lady Barbara Richardson's task forces on domestic violence, both states have asked the Navajo Nation what they can do to help.

"We have told the governors of both states, New Mexico and Arizona, that we do mean business here," Mrs. Shirley said. "We do want our officers to be trained in the way they treat victims of domestic violence."

President Shirley also took time to sign a proclamation to declare April "Navajo Nation Child Abuse Prevention Month." Also signing the proclamation earlier was Speaker Morgan, Navajo Nation Supreme Court Justice Herb Yazzie, Navajo Area Indian Health Service Director John Hubbard and Navajo Area BIA Regional Director Elouise Chicarello.

"Child abuse is very much with us," the President said. "When we abuse our children, we abuse ourselves."

He said that children are sacred to Navajos because they come to us from the Creator.

Retired Chinle District Court Judge Raymond Gilmore, who attended the press conference, said domestic violence and child abuse are really touching Navajo homes and Navajo children.

"We still have issues and violence in our communities," he said. "To really create true life, true love and true peace, it rests with the mothers and fathers."

He said that when Mother Teresa was asked what people could do to create world peace, her answer was, "Go home and love your family."

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