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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., tells chapter officials despite challenges, Diné remain ‘The Great Navajo Nation’

FARMINGTON, N.M. – Although the Navajo Nation faces huge challenges to pay for services for its growing population and develop its economy, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., says it is progressing steadily, rapidly and just as it should for a young government.

“The government is where it should be,” the President told some 150 chapter officials gathered here last week for their annual conference. “We are a great nation, the Great Navajo Nation.”

*“We are a great nation,
the Great Navajo Nation.”*

– Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr.

The President compared the Navajo Nation to an oak tree, mighty in breadth and size while appearing never to change at all.

“We don’t know how many years it’s taken to be the great oak tree, and we are the same way,” he said. “You may not see us growing but we are growing, and you better believe it.”

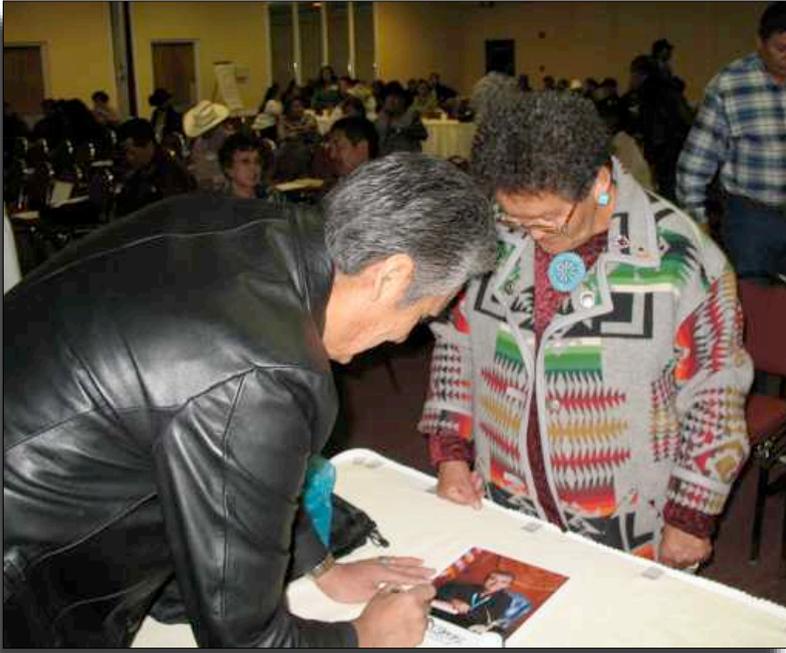
The President said he often hears people say the Navajo government is not moving, changing or progressing fast enough. He said he’s given this much thought and has concluded Navajos always have and will continue to progress at their own pace. This may be the reason Navajos continue to have their own way of life, their own beliefs, speak their own language and revere their culture, clans, history and heritage as tenaciously as they do, he said.



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., appeared before the Navajo Nation's Chapter Officials' Convention in Farmington, N.M., and said that despite challenges and problems, the Navajo Nation is engaged in the greatest progress and development it has ever known in its 83 years as an established democratic government.

That is what is necessary to enable Navajos to persevere 50 years, 100 years and even 500 years into the future as a people with an intact culture and identity, just as they have up to now, he said.

“Yes, we have lots of problems, challenging things facing us as Navajo people,” he said. “But there are a lot of good leaders and that’s the way it’s always been from the past right up to today. Some of us have taken the past leaders’ work and are carrying it on, and I’m one of them.”



President Shirley signs his photograph for Gloria Begay, who was attending the chapter officials’ convention in Farmington last week.

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we cannot hold back.
We cannot give up
as a people.”*

– President Shirley

Despite historical problems the people endured, past leaders left many great accomplishments, and that is why Navajos today are the Great Navajo Nation, he said.

The President said the teachings given to him by medicine people and his grandmother have always been that “there are no impossibilities.”

“As a Navajo, you’re a holy being of the Holy People,” he said. “Because of that, you have to be really careful with your words, very thoughtful. You don’t want to be negative out there. That’s why I don’t just talk without really thinking. I don’t say we can’t do it because I believe we can.”

He told the chapter officials that the Diné have a sacred name that is respected by other tribes and Washington officials who look up to the Navajo Nation.

“Our name is known around the world,” he said. “So, when I think about it, we are where we should be. Granted, there are bumps in the road

and there are challenges we face. But my dream is that 100 years from now, Navajo people will still be here, speaking the language, having the way of life and using the corn pollen. As a people, as a community, as a nation, that’s how it should be, and we will continue to grow with a positive attitude.”

He said all that is needed is for the people to come together to talk about challenges “as leaders, as medicine people, as preachers, as roadmen, as pastors.”

“God willing, we’ll still be Navajo people 100 years from now,” he said.

The President briefed the officials on the Nation’s plans for casinos, new revenues, technology and job creation. With the \$160 million the Navajo Nation now generates, the President said these initiatives can bring the total annual income of the Nation to \$370 million annually by 2010.

He said the Nation plans to build a total of six casinos which is expected to bring in an additional \$100 million a year and create 3,000 to 4,000 new jobs.

He said that while there is concern about gambling addiction, hundreds of Navajos now go to casinos off Navajoland and there is not any funding to deal with those problems if they exist among the people. At least with casinos, there will be money to deal with that problem as well as needs for veterans, Boys & Girls Clubs, housing, social services, and police services, he said.

The proposed Desert Rock Energy Project would bring in \$50 million per year and create 200 to 400 high-paying jobs, he said. The technology to be used is even superior to clean coal technology.

The proposed Williams, Ariz., theme park on the way to the Grand Canyon would provide some \$53 million in new revenue, he said.

In addition, he reported that the Navajo Nation signed memoranda of agreement with the International Telecommunications Union and the Observatory for Cultural and Audiovisual Communication last November in Tunis, Tunisia. These United Nations organizations are interested in the Navajo Nation's development of its satellite-based wireless communications technology in order to show developing nations how they can do the same, and use that as a mean to alleviate poverty.

Because of these agreements, the Navajo Nation is now a voting member of the ITU, has a seat at the table of the United Nations, and OCCAM plans to open an office in Window Rock this year, the President said.

"On our nation, on our land, the United Nations flag will fly," he said.

He said other nations want to know, "How can you still have your language? How can you still have your sacred ways, your sandpaintings?"

"I think we're doing it right and we can't doubt that," the President said. "In 10 years, where are we going to be with our chapter governments? Where are we going to be with the mother government? Regardless of the critics, we cannot hold back. We cannot give up as a people, as a nation, because this is The Great Navajo Nation."

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