



NAVAJO NATION PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT FOUR CORNERS REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER GRAND OPENING

*RED MESA, ARIZONA
APRIL 4, 2007*

Ya'at'eeh! Honorable Navajo Nation Council Delegates, Health and Social Services Committee, Chapter Officials, Four Corners Regional Health Center Steering Committee, Dr. Grim, Mr. John Hubbard, Mr. Anslem Roanhorse, Navajo Area I.H.S. and Four Corners Regional Health Center staff, tribal and non-tribal health officials, relatives and friends.

It is my honor and privilege to join you today to celebrate the grand opening of the new Four Corners Regional Health Center here in Red Mesa. This exciting day marks the results of the tireless efforts of many dedicated and committed individuals to assure access to adequate and improved health care for our Navajo and other Native people in this area.

Four years ago, in April 2003, Dr. Grim was here for the groundbreaking ceremony for this facility, and I am pleased that he has joined us again for the grand opening celebration today.

On behalf of the Navajo Nation, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank all past and present Navajo Nation Council Delegates, chapter officials, the Shiprock I.H.S. health board, and the Four Corners Regional Health Center Steering Committee for their vision, leadership and relentless advocacy for getting construction funding for this facility, and for making this special day possible.

Six chapters – Rock Point, Mexican Water, Teec Nos Pos, Aneth, Red Mesa and Sweetwater – demonstrated 20 years of community empowerment through planning, perseverance and persistent advocacy to obtain funding for the planning, design, construction, and staffing to get this facility built. Today, our prayers have been answered as we celebrate the opening of the Four Corners Regional Health Center.

I would also like to especially thank the Sweetwater Chapter and several families including the Oldman, Yellowman, Clark, Begay and Kitseallyboy families for understanding the dire need for a health center to be located in the community for which they had donated 75-acres of their grazing land on which the health center has been built. Your sincere compassion and generosity will help improve the health status and save the lives of many, many Indian people. *Abe'bee!*

Now, community members do not have to leave early in the morning to travel great distances to the Northern Navajo Medical Center in Shiprock, New Mexico, or the Utah Navajo Health System in Montezuma Creek, Utah, to receive primary care. You will receive your health care services here.

Construction of health care facilities is critical to the Navajo Nation. As Navajo leaders have consistently advocated for over a number of years, Healthcare Facilities Construction and Water and Sanitation Facilities Construction are Navajo's top two health budget priorities primarily due to the lack of nearby facilities or limited services offered at local healthcare facilities, patients often are left without access to proper health care.

The factors that make the Navajo Nation unique include a population of over 180,000 residents, vast and unique remoteness of the Navajo Nation, about 78 percent of our roads are dirt and unpaved which becomes increasingly difficult to travel on during inclement weather, 32 percent of homes lack complete plumbing, and over 60 percent of homes lack telephone service. Although cell phones are now available but majority of the time they are unreliable due to the limited service areas and you have to be on top of the right hill to receive service.

Additionally, by providing state-of-the-art healthcare facilities with advanced healthcare technology, and adequate safe water, wastewater and solid waste systems and related support facilities of homes and communities including those in the most remote and isolated areas will help elevate the health status of the Navajo people.

The Navajo Area has 4 other healthcare facilities proposed to be built in Dilkon, Arizona; Pueblo Pintado, New Mexico; Bodaway Gap, Arizona; and Gallup, New Mexico. Some of those communities and steering committees have invested 30 years of planning for a health center. A number of community members who have been involved from the onset are now elders and wish to see their health center built in their lifetime.

We look to Dr. Grim to allow for that to happen by grandfathering these Navajo projects that I have mentioned into the new priority system. Although the Dilkon Health Center's Program Justification Document was approved by the Indian Health Service in October 2006, we advocate for the planning and design funds for that project to assure construction.

Now, I want to speak briefly about funding. The Navajo Nation is working together with many other tribal leaders advocating the U.S. Congress and the federal government for increased funding of the Indian Health Service through a variety of forums including the national tribal budget consultation sessions that has facilitated our input into the federal budget system.

Because of tribes' unrelenting involvement and coordinated advocacy, we have seen slight increases to the overall Indian Health Service budget over the years including the Fiscal Year 2007 Indian Health Service budget which includes an additional \$125 million, an increase of seven percent over the Fiscal Year 2006 enacted budget level.

While the additional amount may seem to be a huge budget, it will not adequately fund the unmet health care needs of the Native Americans and Alaska Natives. However, we were very encouraged to hear that the additional funding will support the full staffing of this facility for which we must thank Dr. Grim for his commitment to elevating the health status of the American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level. Thank you, Dr. Grim for all your support and commitment to improving our health status.

Before I conclude, I would be remiss if I do not acknowledge and recognize several deserving staff who has worked behind the scene putting together complex plans and justification documents and guiding the community members to make this project a reality. Please join me in applauding Ms. Jenny Notah, Associate Director for the Office of Program Planning and Evaluation with the Navajo Area Indian Health Service; Mr. Gilbert Harrison, Sr., Director of Facilities Management with the Navajo Area Indian Health Service; and Ms. Gloria Harrison, Health Planner with the Navajo Division of Health assigned to the Four Corners Regional Health Center Steering Committee. On behalf of the Navajo Nation, thank you Jenny, Gilbert and Gloria, for your untiring efforts and diligence assisting with preparing voluminous planning, justification and design documents that were required for this magnificent facility.

In closing, I would like to make a special presentation to Dr. Grim. Dr. Grim, on behalf of the great Navajo Nation, I present you this gift to express our deepest appreciation and gratitude for your exceptional leadership, support and commitment to raising the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of Native Americans and Alaska Natives to the highest level. Thank you.

DR. JOE SHIRLEY, JR., PRESIDENT
THE NAVAJO NATION