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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., urges Albuquerque Navajos to form own chapter *Says urban Navajos have right to fair share of tribal resources*

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., on Saturday urged Navajos living in Albuquerque to form their own chapter in order to get their fair share of resources, funding and services from the Navajo government.



Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., reports at the Albuquerque Indian Center on Saturday. With him were the division directors of Health, Education, Social Services, Community Development and Economic Development, Miss Navajo Nation Rachelle James and Miss New Mexico USA Onawa Lacy.

“The Navajo Nation coffers is your money, too,” Dr. Shirley told about 80 Navajos at the Albuquerque Indian Center. “It doesn’t matter where you live. Geography doesn’t come between us. You’re part of a chapter. Parents live back there. Elderly, your medicine people live back there. It’s your land, too. That’s what connects us. It’s your resources. Why shouldn’t you have a part of it?”

Over the past three years, the President has advocated for urban Navajos here, in Phoenix, Denver, Los Angeles and Salt Lake City to organize to create urban chapters. He says Navajo law requires only 1,000 signatures for the process to begin. Forming chapters would automatically ensure funding for the many needs expressed by urban Navajos.

On Saturday, several people expressed frustration with trying to get services or funding for their needs from their home chapters. They report that their chapters treat them as if they are no longer members of the community because they live in urban areas. They say they face a prejudice because they don’t live on the Navajo Nation, and, consequently, are expected to fend for themselves.

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“You’re Navajo people wherever you are,” Dr. Shirley told them. “The geography doesn’t change you. I know you thirst for your culture and for your language, for the mutton stew and fry bread. You thirst to talk to your medicine people, your elderly. You thirst to smell cedar being put on the coals. You thirst to be part of a ceremony.”



The President, Miss Navajo Nation Rachele James and five Navajo Nation division directors came to share a meal and an afternoon of reports. It was the President’s third visit to the center.

Attending with him was Arbin Mitchell, director of the Division of Community Development, Leland Leonard, director of the Department of Education, Cora Maxx-Phillips, director of the Division of Social Services, Allan Begay, director of the Division of Economic Development and Anselm Roanhorse, director of the Division of Health.

President Shirley greets Albuquerque Navajos following presentations by him and five Navajo division directors at the Albuquerque Indian Center on Saturday.

Norman Ration, executive director of the National Indian Youth Council, based in

Albuquerque, facilitated the meeting.

The President said that the Navajo Executive Branch has allocated \$70,000 to Albuquerque Navajos. That’s just a start, he said. More funding, jobs and a voice on the Navajo Nation Council could be had if urban communities established themselves as chapters, he said.

He said he is aware of 15,000 registered Navajo voters in Albuquerque but it is believed that as many as 27,000 actually live here. Phoenix may have as many as 19,000, he said. The Chicago Indian Center reports as many as 35,000 Native people in that area with a high number of them Navajos. Los Angeles and Denver are believed to have as many as 14,000 each, he said.

The President has said the amount of talent, energy and education among urban Navajos is too great for the Navajo Nation to continue to ignore. They must be embraced by the mother government and encouraged to partake in all aspects of Navajo life for the future of the Navajo Nation, he has said.

“My job is to try to get you more resources here but I need your input,” the President said. “Our legislature needs your input. They need to hear from you.”

He said if chapters were created in urban areas, Navajo people there could use the funding that would come automatically to purchase or build a chapterhouse or multipurpose building.

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In Phoenix, a Navajo language and culture teacher has been hired and children are learning the tongue, he said.

“That language is what makes us Navajo people,” Dr. Shirley said. “If we’re going to continue to be Navajos 500 years, 1000 years down the road, we need that language. We need our culture, our color, our sacred stories, our herbs. We need resources to do that. I know we can get there. I know we can get there with you by working together.”

The President reported that the Navajo Nation takes in approximately \$160 million a year from royalties, fees and taxes of Navajo-generated money. The balance of its \$500 million annual budget is federal money but that’s still not enough to meet the needs of its rapidly growing population, he said.

Economic growth, which includes the development of casinos, the Desert Rock Energy Project and other initiatives, is expected to bring in an additional \$350 million of Navajo money, he said.

In the meantime, all Native nations face the same struggle in having the federal government fund their programs, which Dr. Shirley attributed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the two Bush Administration tax cuts.

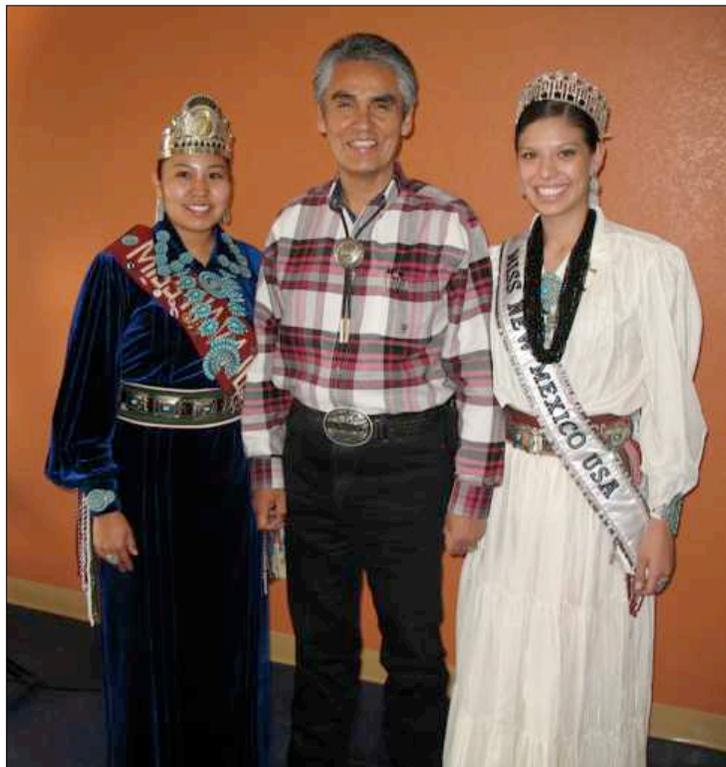
“We are having the biggest problem trying to get at adequate resources trying to fund our scholarship program,” the President said. “Budget cuts have been coming down every year. As much as we try, as many times as we’ve been on (Capitol) Hill, pleading, begging, bowing down to some of the leadership, sometimes we have to speak out with force saying we cannot have any more budget cuts in Indian country. Still, they make cuts, and that’s what we feel back on the motherland.”

Anselm Roanhorse, director of the Division of Health, said a serious concern is the federal government’s funding cuts for health centers around the country. He said the Bush Administration has proposed cutting \$33 million that funds 34 urban Indian centers. One of those cuts may affect the Albuquerque Indian Health Service.

Leland Leonard, director of the Navajo Department of Education, reported that the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act was passed on July 19, 2005. This law elevated the division to department status, established the first Navajo Board of Education which will create a Navajo-based curriculum.

“We’re building it now,” Mr. Leonard said. “We’re changing the face of education on the Navajo Nation.”

He reported that all Navajo students are eligible for a Manuelito Scholarship regardless of where they live. He said a young Navajo student living in Hawaii recently passed the academic, language and history requirements to receive the scholarship.



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., shared the stage with two Navajo royalty – Miss Navajo Nation Rachelle James and Miss New Mexico USA Onawa Lynn Lacy who will become the first Navajo woman to compete for the national title of Miss USA on April 21. The Miss USA pageant will be broadcast on NBC TV.

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