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Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., speaks at Albuquerque VA Hospital for Native American Heritage Month

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., traveled to the Veteran Administration Hospital here Thursday to express his appreciation to veterans.

“It comes from the heart when I say thank you to all our soldiers,” the President said during the hospital’s Native American Heritage Month program. “It’s because we’re free that we do what we want and go around unafraid. It’s all because of our soldiers.”

Speaking with President Shirley was Isleta Pueblo Chief Justice Verna Teller. Judge Teller also served as her tribe’s first woman chairman and onstage at the hospital said freedoms all American enjoy have come at great cost. Already the Navajo Nation has lost six of its soldiers in the Iraq War.

“As citizens, as Native Americans, we must always remember that,” he said. “For every soldier we sent across the way went to protect our way of life, our languages, our color, our sacred places.”

He said before the world-renowned Navajo Code Talkers employed the Navajo language in the South Pacific, offerings of prayers, songs and items were made on the San Francisco Peaks to prepare the way for the language to be used in warfare.

The President said he mentioned this because he wanted to raise a voice of concern that these same sacred mountains are under threat of desecration with the approval of the same government that benefited years earlier from those sacred Navajo prayers and mountain that made winning World War II possible.

There is a plan to desecrate the San Francisco Peaks,” he said.

“What kind of respect is that? It is because of these mountains and Navajos making a contribution to win the war. – The President said it behooves Native people to learn their sacred stories, use their languages, keep their color, learn their ceremonies and continue to defend their country.

He said that as members of the five-fingered, intelligent earth dwellers called homo sapiens, “we’re supposed to be on the same side.

It doesn’t matter what color, creed or place you’re from. Navajo teaching say that monsters continue to inhabit the earth preying on people indiscriminately, he said. These are the monsters of poverty, thirst, hunger, greed, jealousy and all manner of diseases.

“The sooner we come to the understanding that we’re all on the same side, the sooner we save ourselves,” he said. “It behooves us to have respect for one another.”

He said he would like to see Navajo people continue to be 100 years from now, 500 years from now, even 1,000 years from now. “Respect for one another will go a long way for us continuing to be,” he said.

“Preserving tradition, embracing sacredness, wisdom of the future”

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