

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NAVAJO LEADERS REAFFIRM COMMITMENT TO PROMOTE AND ADVOCATE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

On August 16, Navajo Nation leaders reaffirmed their commitment to educate, promote and advocate for the nation's people with disabilities with the signing of a Proclamation declaring September 7, 2006 a day of recognition for people with disabilities.

The highlight of the recognition will be a mock rodeo held especially for exceptional children during the 60th Annual Navajo Nation Fair. The rodeo will feature Kidz Cowboy Roping, Lickity Split Barrel Racing, Horse Grooming, the Pony Express and the popular Mighty Buck.

"It's a day that is for them," Ruth Bitsui said. Bitsui, who is well-known on the rodeo circuit, has been the lead organizer for the Exceptional Rodeo, which is now in its second year.

Leaders, including Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan, Vice President Frank Dayish, Associate Justice Lorene B. Ferguson, and Resources Committee Chairperson George Arthur, reiterated that the Exceptional Rodeo will now be an annual tradition at the fair before they signed the Proclamation.

Speaker Morgan relayed the message that rodeos for children with disabilities would expand beyond the Navajo Nation Fair to other fairs and rodeos throughout the Navajo Nation and among other tribes.

"Year after year, it's going to keep coming back to the Navajo Nation. Eventually, it will expand," Speaker Morgan said adding that he saw it was being heavily promoted among teachers and leaders.

"A lot of pride has been taken by cowboys and cowgirls [through their participation in this event]," Speaker Morgan said. He recalled witnessing the beginnings of the Indian National Finals Rodeo and said he saw the Exceptional Rodeo expanding in the same way.

Vice President Dayish agreed with the Speaker. "Now it's going to expand to our programs. I challenge everyone, let's get programs going for our exceptional children. Let's start helping these people who have a lot of potential," he said.

Fitting with the theme of this year's annual fair, "A Time for Reflection and Renewal," planning team member Clarina Arviso-Boyd reflected on last year's rodeo. Arviso-Boyd is the director of Special

Education at Ganado Unified School District.

Arviso-Boyd recalled that children who attended the rodeo last year continued to wear their T-shirts and cowboy hats weeks after the event.

“You have made a highlight for these children,” Arviso-Boyd said to the leaders, planning team members and other participants.

She added that in the past, “There was not enough publicity to say, ‘These are our children. We will no longer hide them.’”

“Watching these children, they had big smiles. Having them experience that is the whole legacy of experiential learning,” Boyd-Arviso said.

“I haven’t seen so much fun come out of a rodeo arena,” she said. “It will touch your heart when you’re there.”

Arviso-Boyd also introduced April Brown, a student from Ganado school district who was one of the honored participants in last year’s Exceptional Rodeo.

John Boyd, Jr., president of AIRCA and a member of the planning team, said, “It’s something different. It’s something fun.”

Boyd turned to April and said “Thank you for putting happiness back in my heart. I’ve rodeo-ed all my life. They only I can give back is to give to these little kids.”

Associate Justice Ferguson commended the planning team. “It’s important to set aside a special day for exceptional children in a sport held in high regard. You can tell that our exceptional children are held in high regard,” she said.

“It takes a lot of patience and effort to work with exceptional children and to go beyond that [to plan an event] shows a great deal of compassion. Not only do we recognize these children, we also set aside this day to recognize those people that have that compassion,” Ferguson added.