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Speaker Naize vocalizes support and gratitude for veterans at annual flag raising remembrance event honoring Ira H. Hayes



SACATON, Ariz. – Speaking before a crowd of 300 people on Feb. 23 at the Mathew B. Juan and Ira H. Hayes Veterans Memorial Park, Speaker Johnny Naize (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) expressed gratitude on behalf of the Navajo Nation for the honorable military service of the late Ira H. Hayes at the 68th Anniversary Iwo Jima Flag Raising event.

Hayes, a member of the Akimel O’odham (Pima) people, was a U.S. Marine who served during World War II, and received widespread recognition for his significant part in the raising of the American Flag atop Mount Suribachi on Feb. 23, 1945, during the Battle of Iwo Jima.

“I want to thank the Gila River Indian Community for a son that we all celebrate today for the service he has done,” said Speaker Naize. “He is well-known throughout the country and the whole world for his services. And today, we remember him for his service.”

Speaker Naize also lent appreciation to members of the Central Navajo Veterans Organization Color guard who raised the Army flag during the raising of the military service flags that morning.

Council Delegates Alton Joe Shepherd (Cornfields, Ganado, Jeddito, Kin Dah łichíí', Steamboat), Jonathan Hale (St. Michaels, Oak Springs), and Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) also attended the event to show support for veterans, a gesture that meant a lot to Commander Donald Bizadi from the veterans organization at Chinle Chapter.

“We need our leaders to follow us out here, participating in our activities,” said Commander Bizadi, adding that it was especially important to have the support of Navajo leadership when advocating in Washington, D.C. at the national level for the needs of Navajo veterans.

Commander Bizadi said he felt that Speaker Naize was very supportive of Navajo veterans. “He respects us,” he said of Speaker Naize.

Former Navajo Chairman Peter MacDonald, and current president of the Navajo Code Talkers Association, offered a few words before Speaker Naize, calling it a great day to “honor a warrior that we all respect.”

MacDonald recalled the accomplishments of the Navajo Code Talkers on the island of Iwo Jima during battle.

Within the first 48 hours of landing, over 800 messages of Navajo code were sent through the air “without a single mistake,” said MacDonald. “That’s Navajo code going through the air every three minutes non-stop for 48 hours.”

Bearing acknowledgement to the number of Navajo Code Talkers and veterans in attendance at the event, Speaker Naize thanked them and all veterans for their service and sacrifice.

“As leaders, we will continue to work for and serve our veterans. We thank you, and we will continue to give you support,” said Speaker Naize.

Urban Giff, commander of the Ira H. Hayes American Legion Post No. 84 that sponsors the annual flag raising commemoration event in Sacaton, thanked the Navajo Nation leadership and veterans for showing their support of the event year after year.

Among the Navajo Code Talkers in attendance, as mentioned by MacDonald, were Sidney Bedoni, Alfred Peaches, George Willie, Wilford Buck, and George James, Sr.

Members of the Central Navajo Veterans Organization who were present included Johnson Claw, Al Wheeler, Thomas Cooke, Clarence Gorman, Elaine Gorman, Donald Bizadi, Lee Chee, and Wilmer Woody.

The Iwo Jima flag raising event honoring Ira H. Hayes occurs each year on the weekend nearest the date on which the American flag was raised on Mount Suribachi.

Hayes was born on Jan. 12, 1923 in Sacaton, Ariz., and died on Jan. 24, 1955.

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