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Council members deliver leadership insight at 2017 Navajo Nation Agriculture Elected Officials Summit

Photo: Council Delegate Davis Filfred providing opening remarks at the 2017 Navajo Nation Agriculture Elected Officials Summit on March 1, 2016 in Albuquerque, N.M.

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – Last week, Navajo Nation Council members were invited to provide opening remarks during the 2017 Navajo Nation Agriculture Elected Officials Summit, which started on Feb. 27 and concluded on March 1.

According to Leo Watchman, department manager for the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture, the summit served as an orientation for newly elected officials that serve on boards relating to agriculture, grazing, and land use. Approximately 120 elected officials were sworn in this year, and nearly 65 of the total officials are newly elected members.

On the first day of the summit, vice chair of the Resources and Development Committee Council Delegate Benjamin Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill) addressed a crowd of

nearly 160 summit participants and welcomed the officials to the orientation stating that there is much work to do in improving agriculture and grazing policies.

“The summit not only served as an orientation for our newly elected agriculture, grazing, and land board officials, but as a platform to developing new ideas to foster positive relationships and policy improvements,” said Delegate Bennett. “Elected officials play an important role in making important decisions, as well as advocating for their communities.”

He added that the RDC have begun proposing changes to the home site leasing process, grazing permit policies, and are addressing land status issues pertaining to allotment and trust lands.

Delegate Bennett participated in the breakout sessions throughout the first day to hear from programs and the elected officials to gain feedback and recommendations regarding farming and ranching issues, and how policies can be shaped to benefit Navajo agricultural ventures and land use.

RDC member Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tółikan, Red Mesa) also provided an opening address at the summit on its final day, in which he stressed the importance of leadership skills of elected officials to ensure efficient outcomes for Navajo citizens they serve.

“It is very important to always keep your constituents and stake holders informed. Although you may get caught up in the large amount of work you do, you must remember that you have to report back to the communities you serve. They are a part of the process and look to you for guidance and decision-making on their behalf,” said Delegate Filfred.

Delegate Filfred added that he wishes the newly elected officials the best as they begin their journey as leaders, and encouraged reelected leaders to continue “working hard” at ongoing projects and initiatives they seek to complete within their communities.

“Being a leader is difficult at times, but please do not forget that the end-goal is to help our people in improving land use, agriculture, and ranching—the very foundation of who we are as Navajo people,” said Delegate Filfred.

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