23rd Navajo Nation Council
Office of the Speaker

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MEDIA CONTACTS
Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Navajo leaders commemorate the Navajo Treaty of 1868 exhibit at the National Museum of the American Indian

PHOTO: (left to right) President Russell Begaye, Vice President Jonathan Nez, Council Delegate Steven Begay, Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr., Council Delegate Davis Filfred, and Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. during the installation celebration of The Treaty of 1868 at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 20, 2018.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council, President Russell Begaye, and Vice President Jonathan Nez were in attendance on Tuesday, as the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian unveiled the original Treaty of 1868 at the "Nation to Nation" exhibition, which explores the diplomacy, promises, and betrayals involved in the 200-years of treaties and treaty making between the U.S. government and Native Nations.

In 1864, the Navajo people were forcefully removed from their homelands and moved 300 miles east to Bosque Redondo, N.M, which is known as Hwéeldi or The Long Walk. The Treaty of 1868, also know as Naaltsoos Sání in the Navajo language, allowed the Navajo people to return to their homelands and established an intergovernmental relationship between the Navajo people the U.S. government.

During the event, Council Delegate Steven Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a') said the treaty signifies, recognizes, and honors the strength and resilience of the Navajo people.

"This is an emotional event for our people. However, the resiliency and strength of the Navajo people is shown through the treaty. The return of the original treaty to the Navajo Nation would allow the younger generation to embrace and honor the history of our people," said Delegate Begay, who also delivered a Navajo blessing-way prayer during the event.

On June 1, 2018, the Navajo Nation Museum plans to publicly exhibit/display the original Navajo Treaty of 1868 to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the signing of the treaty.

Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tółikan, Red Mesa) stated that the treaty also illustrates the independence, sovereignty, and self-determination of the Navajo people and the Nation.

"The treaty established the government-to-government relationship, which needs to be respected and honored by the U.S. government. There are ongoing injustices by the federal government and the Treaty of 1868 needs to be upheld," said Delegate Filfred.

Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai'Bii'To, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake) said the return of the treaty would also allow the younger generation to learn and better understand the history of our people and encourage self identity.

"Our hope as leaders is for our Navajo children to continue the resiliency for many more generations to come," added Delegate Slim.

On Feb. 9, Speaker LoRenzo Bates, President Begaye, and Chief Justice JoAnn Bitsilly Jayne signed a proclamation to commemorate the 150th year anniversary of the signing of the Naaltsoos Sání – The Treaty of 1868. The "Year of the Naaltsoos Saní" recognizes, honors, and reflects on the strength and resiliency of the Navajo people in the past, present, and future.

Also in attendance were Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), Council Delegate Norman M. Begay (Alamo, Ramah, Tohajiilee), and Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins). The treaty exhibition is currently open to the public at the National Museum of the American Indian.

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