THE STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION

President Ben Shelly

Presented to the
22ND NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Speaker, members of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council, chapter officials, relatives, and friends. It is always my privilege to appear before this distinguished body.

It is my honor to introduce my wife of 47 years, the First Lady Mrs. Martha Shelly. She’s my foundation and the strength of our family to which I am very grateful.

Vice President Rex Lee Jim is representing us in consultations on health and education in Washington D.C.

The Vice President and I want to say thank you to everyone here today, especially our Navajo citizens sitting in the galley. I want to acknowledge visiting federal, state, county and other tribal leaders here with us today. Most importantly, I want to thank our Code Talkers, veterans and those who continue to serve in the arm forces.

I attended the Mescalero Apache Tribal inauguration earlier this month. Fifth and sixth
Grader’s letters were read and they expressed their hopes for the future.

They wrote about their parent’s alcohol abuse; that abuse lead to child abuse and hunger. They were hungry because their parents spent money on alcohol.

These letters are heavy on my heart because I know some of our Navajo children are in the same situation.

These children were asking their leaders for change and a better tomorrow.

It is our place to work together to solve these troubling dilemmas. We can use our leadership to build on our Nation’s future.

Our people expect a stable and reliable government. We can grant them that wish as each of us recounts our oath and choose to uphold our commitment to the people.

Recently, members of Nageezi Chapter passed a resolution seeking our assistance. They wanted more officers in the area to provide more patrols for Highway 550 due to a rise of alcohol related accidents.

We responded with a real working solution within seven days.

Together with the State of New Mexico and San Juan County Sherriff’s office, we came up with a plan to protect travelers and residents along Hwy. 550 and put personnel into the Dzil Naaoolth Dithle Substation.
This year, I am presenting to you our Navajo Nation Energy Policy.

The Energy Policy will guide us as we develop our resources and renewable energy potential. We have already taken large steps and met with energy stake holders. We’ve done so with the health of our people in mind. Energy is our primary source of gross revenue receipts.

The Energy Policy is comprehensive and will be presented to this Council by spring session. We are the first Sovereign Nation with a developed Energy Policy, which will reflect today’s technologies.
I will be signing a Memorandum of Understanding next week with the U.S. Department of Energy’s Lawrence Livermore National Lab so that the Navajo Nation moves forward with developing energy projects.

The MOU will allow technical assistance from leading energy personnel to assist us in solving a few of our Nation’s energy issues.

We want to establish a research and development facility where some of our brightest minds will work on Navajo energy issues and put the Navajo Nation in a position to compete with the rest of the world.
Our Human Resources division doesn’t have internal policies for the hiring process. We need internal policies that are fair for those applying for Navajo Nation jobs.

This year, I will sign an executive order for all Navajo Nation Divisions to finalize policies and procedures that make our own Navajo Nation Employees fully accountable.

These new government guidelines will establish order and make our programs a better and stronger work place.

We will tighten the use of our government p-card system so that it works with sufficient accountability. The Office of the Controller and the Department of Justice will create a more comprehensive p-card policy this quarter.

On another financial matter, I want to hear from our Navajos living in Utah and what they think about the Navajo Utah Trust Fund.

Next month, I will host a series of town hall meetings to hear what the Utah Navajo communities want.

I want my marching orders to come from them.

This year, I have proposed the Navajo Nation Sales Tax Distribution Reform Act of 2012 would split Navajo sales tax revenues with 10 percent to Navajo scholarships.
This plan will raise up to $4 million annually for Navajo Nation Scholarships.

My role is to foster job creation and scholarships. But I also have to protect existing jobs and revenues.

Currently, the U.S. EPA is proposing that the Navajo Generation Station install costly emission reduction technology. The technology could force the closure of the plant, which would negatively impact our economy and cost Navajos their jobs.

Through President Obama’s Executive Order, tribal consultation with the U.S. EPA will allow federal regulators to understand how the proposal will affect Navajo lives.

We are negotiating a new lease for the power plant that could bring much needed revenues to the Nation.

We are making sure that Navajos, like NGS employee Ray Holgate and his coworkers have jobs for many years to come.

Mr. Holgate wrote, “If Navajo’s could see for themselves, they’d know NGS is a place to be proud of, not to look down on.”
During the past year, together we completed many tasks and we need to continue working together.

Most recently, we celebrated the opening of Northern Edge casino.

This business venture brought 374 new jobs to the Four Corners Region. It opened with record numbers in attendance.

Twin Arrows Resort and Casino construction is on schedule and will be open for business in 2013.

Through negotiations on various programs and projects, such as Navajo Head Start and NIIP, we saved $125 million.

By working together with all three branches, we are finishing off the multi judicial complexes in Tuba City, Kayenta and Crownpoint and we are working on plans for other communities.

We must be prepared for cuts to the federal budget.
In our annual budget we are in a surplus mode. It is important we remain responsible and protect the people’s budget.

This year, we are asking our divisions to create budgets that require a five percent reduction because the federal budget may shrink by as much as 15 percent.

That brings me to my final point.

A year ago, I sat in this chamber and spoke of unity and working together.

It’s important that we keep our commitment to the work ahead and where we all want to be: A strong, confident Nation. We are creating jobs, making education better, and becoming a healthier people.

I propose a Legislative and Executive Branch Summit to discuss growth, and how we can make government more responsive in meeting the needs of the people.
It is now one year into this Council and my presidency. This is a new year with new opportunities.

As leaders let’s honor and respect each other. We can debate issues and disagree. We’ll always face opposition, but we must work for the betterment of the people and the Nation.

Let’s get it done.

With your faith, hope and prayers, may we again as tribal leaders find common ground to lead this Nation to prosperity.

Thank you for your public service and may God bless each and every one of you.