



THE NAVAJO NATION

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President Begaye, Vice President Nez announce OPVP Veterans Liaison, attend Navajo Nation Veterans Services and Benefits Summit



Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez attended the Navajo Nation Veterans Services and Benefit Summit at the UNM-Gallup Branch on June 24 and shared their vision to have all divisions across the Executive Branch to provide services to Navajo veterans. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

GALLUP, N.M.—Navajo veterans are the number one priority for the Begaye-Nez administration.

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez conveyed that fact to the veterans in attendance at the Navajo Nation Veterans Services and Benefits Summit at the UNM-Gallup Campus on June 24.

They shared the four pillars of the administration: Navajo Veterans, Elders and Youth, Infrastructure and Job Creation.

“The way we see it, veterans are first because they are the protectors, they keep us safe,” said President Begaye.

Elders are second on the priority listing because they are the keepers of Navajo way of life and the Navajo language, he added. The youth are included with this pillar because of the intergenerational opportunities that exist between the two age groups.

“Then come the things we make a life with: roads, facilities,

electricity and water. Infrastructure,” President Begaye said.

Finally, it’s how we are going to make a living for ourselves, providing food, shelter and transportation to our families. Job creation, he added.

He said the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President met with the 23rd Navajo Nation Council to align priorities for the nation to ensure one voice on issues nationally and internationally.

Since then, the administration has met with all divisions under the Executive Branch and stressed the need to include Navajo veterans in their division strategy, whether for employment, training or other forms of assistance.

“Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs is not the only entity that will be working with veterans, it’s going to be the entire Executive Branch,” said President Begaye.

Veterans employ a common sense approach to overcoming challenges, he said, and their primary objective in all things is to get the job done.

Vice President Jonathan Nez said they went to Washington, D.C. and met with 18 members of Congress and the Senate.

They shared veteran issues with housing, employment and health care, in particular, mental health counseling services for post traumatic stress disorder.

“The reason why we’re here is for passage of the Navajo Nation Veterans Act. We want to know what our veterans think,” Vice President Nez said.

He said a meeting with U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro was productive and that a housing voucher system for veterans is available to assist with paying their rent and utilities.

“This isn’t the only veterans summit we’ll have. We’re going to meet again on the Navajo Nation for the duration of the administration,” said Vice President Nez.

The administration will be focused on three areas during the term of office: passage of the Navajo Nation Veterans Act, veterans housing and veterans health care through the creation of regional service center for the Veterans Administration on the Navajo Nation.

“We’re going to create partnerships with the Veterans Administration, HUD and IHS. We want to bring these three agencies into one, so the restrictions between the three can be minimized,” President Begaye said.

Vice President Nez introduced former Ariz. Rep. Jamescita Peshlakai as the veteran liaison for OPVP.

“We brought a new individual on to our team, the Begaye-Nez administration. She is a veteran and former state representative for Arizona,” Vice President Nez said. “President and I felt that she could bridge that gap between Office of the President Vice President and Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs.”

Jamescita Mae Peshlakai is a U.S. Army veteran who served with the 403rd Combat Support Hospital in the Persian Gulf War. She was stationed in the neutral zone between Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

She has a bachelor’s degree in history and philosophy and a master’s degree in educational psychology.

“I worked with the workforce investment act programs. I served in the public safety, military and regulatory affairs committee and the veterans caucus,” Peshlakai said of her service as a state representative.

“I hope that I serve in the capacity that you all so deserve,” she added.

Prior to the summit, President Begaye and Vice President Nez met with the commander and vice commander of the Northern Agency Veterans Organization to discuss issues facing veterans from that region.

Many of the priorities there fell in line with the topics presented during the discussions at the summit. Their interests were to identify veteran initiatives endorsed by the administration and how they could be a part of the process.



Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez said the Office of the President and Vice President has come through on the commitment to appoint a veterans liaison within the office to work on veterans affairs. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Edsel Pete, department manager for the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs, said the Chinle and Eastern Agencies have completed their 15 veterans homes for 2014. The other agencies will be done in mid-July. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Nick Brokeshoulder of UNM-Gallup Branch said he works on behalf of native veterans attending school at the university. He said 80 percent of the student body is comprised of natives and 70 percent are Navajo. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

