

THE OFFICE OF THE NAVAJO NATION PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT



**STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION ADDRESS
23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL + SUMMER SESSION**

MONDAY, JULY 18, 2016

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Ya'at'eeh' Shi' Ke' doo Shi' Dine'. It's an honor for us to be here to deliver the State of the Nation Address for Summer Session 2016. Good Afternoon to the honorable delegates of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council and Speaker LoRenzo Bates, distinguished members in the audience and most importantly, members of the great Navajo Nation.

I'd like to welcome all our youth and elders who are here today. I would like to acknowledge all the runners and riders who participated in the Run for a Stronger and Healthier Navajo Nation last week and Annual Run and Ride to the Council this morning.

MOU with Arizona Department of Veterans Services
Veterans is the first pillar for our Administration. Earlier this year, with the assistance of Agency Commanders, Navajo Veterans and the Navajo Nation Council, we were able to pass the Navajo Veterans Act. This was a monumental and historical act, which was the first of it's kind across

Native America.

The legislation established a Veterans Advisory Council that encourages veteran participation in policy matters and an opportunity for the veterans to come to the table to help shape policy that affects their services and benefits.

Since the passing of the Navajo Veterans Act, we have sworn in the Veterans Advisory Council who have been busy drafting the Plans of Operation. Our Veterans liaison, Jamescita Peshlakai and the Veterans Advisory Council are now sharing the draft Plans of Operation with the Navajo Veterans around the Navajo Nation for comments. We hope to see the Plans of Operation legislation approved by the Health, Education and Human Services Committee of the Navajo Nation Council very soon.

In June, the Navajo Nation signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Arizona Department of Veterans Ser-

vices (ADVS) that allows ADVS to accredit Navajo Veteran Service officers. The MOU between the Navajo Nation and ADVS affords Navajo Veteran Service officers access to all Veteran's Affairs infrastructure to file claims on behalf of Navajo veterans. Veterans will no longer have to travel to an office outside of the Navajo Nation to get proper services. We will be able to provide services to them right at home.

I am proud to announce that we now have the VASH voucher program on the Navajo Nation. This gives Veterans Administration the ability to extend the voucher program to homeless Navajo veterans. The program can extend to places like Flagstaff, Page, Phoenix and Tucson regardless if they are situated on the Navajo Nation or not. No veteran should be homeless and this is one more step to seeing every Veteran with a home.

AMBER Alert/Emergency Alert System

On May 3rd of this year, the effectiveness of the Nation's emergency alert system was called into question when 11 year-old Ashlynn Mike was abducted and killed near Shiprock, N.M. This tragedy affected the entire nation and because of which, President Begaye and I had issued a directive to have an emergency alert system specific to the Navajo Nation put into place alongside the national AMBER Alert system.

Regarding this, the Nation has since developed a working relationship with the State Amber Alert coordinators in Utah, New Mexico and Arizona to assist with issuing Amber Alerts in case of any children being abducted in the future. The Emergency Alert Task Force has been providing Amber Alert training across the nation in communities like Tuba City, Chinle, Shiprock, Crownpoint and Window Rock. The task force will continue to deliver Amber Alert Trainings.

The task force has completed an Amber Alert Reporting Form for the Police District to utilize in the event of a child abduction, this form is being finalized with input from the Police Districts. The task force has also been in contact with vendors to provide demonstrations regarding software to issue Mass Emergency Notifications in the event of an emergency, whether it's related to AMBER Alerts, natural or manmade disasters or weather emergencies.

On June 4, 2016, the first Amber alert was heard throughout the Navajo Nation on our cellphones. There is still more work to be done. I thank our team, Jesse Delmar, Theresa Hopkins, Bidtah Becker and everyone who worked tire-

lessly to implement this system on the Navajo Nation.

Ever since the administration has taken office, both President and I have pushed and directed Department of Public Safety Director Jesse Delmar to hire a Chief of Police. This position has remained vacant for the past eight years. So it is significant that we mention that the Navajo Division of Public Safety has selected a Chief of Police.

Phillip Francisco has been selected to be our next Chief of Police. Francisco is Bilaganna born for Ha'shtl'ishnii. His maternal grandfather is Bilaganna and his paternal grandfather is To'da'chii'nii.

He is currently going through the formalities of being hired and clearing all background checks. He has years of experience as a Police Officer with the Farmington Police Department. We look forward for him to officially start this next month.

In this, I would like to thank the Division of Human Resources' efforts in conjunction with Department of Personnel Management for assisting the Division of Public Safety in hiring the Navajo Nation Chief of Police. Working together we have been able to fill this vacancy.

Building the Navajo Economy

As our fourth pillar is job creation, we have diligently been assessing the current state of the Navajo economy, the unemployment rate and the process of starting small businesses on the Nation. The Office of the President and Vice President along with the Division of Economic Development successfully hosted the first annual Navajo Nation Economic Summit which drew 747 participants.

Through the Economic Summit, we heard issues and ideas that can help move the Nation's economic state forward. We need to consider creating business opportunity zones where entrepreneurs can start business while receiving tax breaks and other beneficial assistance. There is lack of infrastructure like water and power lines to adequately support economic development. Our focus is to start building the foundation needed to become more business friendly and break down the barriers that are impeding development on our Nation.

Our administration has created the first Council of Economic Advisors to the President and Vice President. The Council is made up of 6 advisors with various backgrounds to provide varying views on economic policy.

Their responsibility will be to provide objective empirical research for the OPVP. They will also assist with the president's annual economic report. The Council has two professors who are internationally known for their scholarly economic development research on what works for tribes. It hosts experts on investment, economic and business development, and tribal government. The sum of their collected experience is what we will use to navigate our economic future and endeavors.

Our first meeting of the CEA resulted in four focus areas that will substantially impact the Nation and Navajo/Native business owners. I've consistently spoken out against the practice of dual taxation which is seriously impacting our Nation.

Building Economy/Leasing

The Nation faces an unemployment rate of about 47 percent and we are facing a decline in revenues from our natural resource industries. We need to reevaluate our dependence on these revenues as well as our dependence on outside dollars. Our tribal members need to support the local economy and move away from taking their paychecks to border towns. We can empower our people by keeping our dollars on the Nation. We need to consider that 80 percent of our paychecks are spent on outside businesses. We need to reduce and stop this way of thinking.

Accordingly we've been working with pertinent departments to address our economy. The Division of Economic Development as amended and updated their Master Plan of Operations to be realigned with the One Voice, One Nation theme. The strategy incorporates the Four Pillars and the Three Branch Chiefs priorities.

DED, DNR, and EPA are developing a 'one stop shop' for leasing, which has opened a doorway to technological innovation by their staff who have discovered multiple uses for the Navajo Land Title Data System (NLTDS). The project, in its early stages of development, is expected to be completed by January 1 and will streamline this cumbersome leasing process.

Through DED, the ArcGIS program is also in its early stages of development as we begin to create a system that can identify business development sites, display 3-D images of communities and more. With the potential of accessing, using and storing data more efficiently, a migration to a digitized environment opens the door for better information. The business licensing software is also complete with

one final amendment currently under discussion.

Looking ahead, our administration remains committed to providing solutions to challenges that previously hindered development. As a result of embracing this new approach, DED has been able to assist and eventually see the construction of the new KTNN facility, opened the door for new hotel development, and embarked upon the exploration of using technology to improve, streamline and expand information critical to understanding the economic environment.

ICWA

Our Division of Social Services has undertaken new initiatives by partnering with the Navajo Children and Family Services Program (NCFS) and the Casey Family Program (CFP) on a sponsored National project called the "Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Foster Home Recruitment Project" through a Tribal-State collaboration approach. The purpose of this project is to increase the number of Native American foster homes in New Mexico, whereby the State of New Mexico will place ICWA children in Native American foster homes before resorting to non-native foster homes. We feel it is important to always try to keep our Native/Navajo children within Native homes or with extended families. Our culture and extended kinship system is our blueprint to protecting our children.

Behavioral Health Investment Zone

The Navajo Department of Health has been working with the State of New Mexico and the City of Gallup on a Behavioral Health Investment Zone Plan. The City of Gallup has been awarded a grant from the State of New Mexico in the amount of \$500,000 to support this plan. The Behavioral Health Investment Zone Plan's overall goal is to reduce alcohol related injury and death, which remains an issue during the winter months. Myself and OPVP Executive Staff Assistant Mark Freeland have been identified to serve on the BHIZ Oversight Board. This is one way we hope to address the exposure deaths that have plagued our communities.

Pursuant to the Executive Order issued last November, the Building Communities of Hope team, continue to visit schools and communities to combat the high suicide rates on the Nation. Part of the Executive Order, requires all Navajo Nation employees to receive training on suicide prevention and awareness. OPVP and Navajo Department of Health and Department of Behavioral Health Services are collaborating to assist with the training and currently

approximately 1,500 employees have participated in the training. We feel this is a tremendous success in being proactive in protecting our Navajo people.

Sen. Pierce/Ft. Wingate Bill

My administration is working hard to protect the rights to all our land, not just the land that is currently a part of our current reservation but also the greater land which has yet to be returned to us. This includes the Ft. Wingate, Shash Bitoo' area. In particular, my administration is working with the Speaker of the Council to uphold the Nation's two resolutions protecting our rights of way over these traditional lands.

On May 18, Representative Steve Pearce added language to the National Defense Authorization Act in the House of Representatives that could impact the Ft. Wingate land. Both the executive and legislative branches clearly opposed Mr. Pearce's provision. The Nation testified against the stand-alone bill twice. However in late May he worked behind the scenes and against the Nation's written and expressed wishes to include his version of the Ft. Wingate return of lands in a much larger defense authorization bill.

My administration along with the Speaker of the Council vehemently opposed the inclusion of this language in the House version of the defense authorization bill. We are working to ensure that the final bill does not include the Ft. Wingate land transfer in its current form. In its current form the bill gives away rights of way over the land to an outside utility company and the City of Gallup -- forever and without any compensation to the Navajo Nation.

We have already received written support from other tribes such as the White Mountain Apache and the Winnebago of Nebraska. We are working on gaining more support from other tribes and organizations including the National Congress of American Indians because this language sets a bad precedent for all future land returns to tribes. It would allow handouts and earmarks for outside utilities and municipalities that have no aboriginal right to tribal lands. My administration will continue to fight for full authority over all our traditional lands.

Infrastructure/Roads

The development of infrastructure is a major pillar in our administration. We need adequate infrastructure for business and economic development as well as to serve the basic needs of our Navajo people such as providing them with water and power. Roads are a big initiative for us as well.

Navajo DOT recently reaffirmed two partnerships that leverage our resources to assist the needs of our citizens. Intergovernmental relationships are being established that are integral to improving our standards of living. For residents of San Juan County, NM we have partnered with the County Public Works Department to complete approximately \$3 million in road improvement projects for Navajo Nation citizens. Across the Nation, in Coconino County, we are beginning an initiative with their Public Works Department to complete over \$7 million worth of road improvements for Navajo citizens of the county.

We are committed to improving the roads throughout the Nation to support educational improvement as well as in providing basic infrastructure needs to our people.

Bears Ears Initiative

This past Saturday I joined the supporters, organizers and advocates on behalf of the Bears Ears Initiative at the Bears Ears Summer Gathering. Along with Council Speaker LoRenzo Bates, I delivered a letter to President Obama through Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell in support of the initiative and in hopes that he would protect this sacred site.

The Bears Ears region is distinctive and significant in both culture and tradition to surrounding tribes, including the Navajo Nation. The Bears Ears region is especially important to the Navajo Nation as the birthplace of Headman Manuelito, an important figure in our contemporary history. Manuelito helped our people return from Bosque Redondo to our Dine homeland after the Long Walk. When we visit the Bears Ears region, we greet these places by their names as if they were people - other than human people - with whom we can communicate, and who can communicate with us. Through this relationship, we are able to negotiate healing, not just of body, mind, soul, and heart but also as a community and society.

We respectfully requested that 1.9 million acres of federal public lands around the Bear's Ears Buttes (Shash Jaa') in southeastern Utah be designated a national monument pursuant to the Antiquities Act of 1906. Furthermore, because of the Navajo people's direct tie to this land, we are asking for co-equal management of these lands. This would be respectful and will ensure protection of our history that exists in every part of this region.

At the 2015 White House Tribal Nations Conference, President Obama stated that he would "review tribal proposals

to permanently protect sacred lands for future generations.” President Obama has been a friend to tribes and our initiatives. We can only hope and pray that before he leaves office, that he will ‘Protect the Bear Ears’.

Working Together to Better the Navajo Nation

We move forward in addressing the issues facing the Nation with the concept of “One Voice, One Nation” as our call to action. There is no single branch of government that can address and overcome these obstacles alone. When we are successful in making progress for our people and our nation, we are successful together and we need to remember this. We need to work together on legislations that affect the services and needs of the Navajo people.

In May of 2016 we celebrated the one year anniversary of the Begaye-Nez administration. We have been working diligently to bring change to the Nation. We have been bringing about change in working through the Four Pillars of our administration. We want a healthier Nation. We want our people to have hope and to be prosperous. We are working to support and develop an economy that will provide for us all. We are working support both our elders and our youth.

After we speak here today, Vice President and I will head to the first annual Youth and Elder Summit, facilitated to foster intergenerational communication and teaching. I’d like to thank Yvonne Kee-Billison, Executive Staff Assistant for her efforts in organizing this Summit. We invite you all to attend the summit being held at Dine College in Tsaile.



Russell Begaye, *President*
THE NAVAJO NATION



Jonathan Nez, *Vice-President*
THE NAVAJO NATION

