

HÓZHÓQJÍ NAHAT'ÁH BAA HANE'

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1
MAY 2016

EXECUTIVE BRANCH NEWS
WWW.NNOPVP.ORG



NAVAJO VETERANS

Passage of the Navajo Nation Veterans Act was only the beginning

FY 2017 BUDGET

An opportunity for restructuring and streamlining tribal government services

A LOOK BACK

Begaye-Nez administration reflects on first full year in office for Navajo Nation

Gerald Nelson
38

PRESIDENT RUSSELL BEGAYE MESSAGE



Yá'át'ééh!

It's been a year since the Begaye-Nez administration has taken office and we have made tremendous headway with many of the promises we made during our campaign. This was done by working with our partners in the tribal council and building upon the four pillars of our administration: veterans, elders and youth, infrastructure, and job creation.

The One Nation, One Voice agreement we executed with our colleagues in the Legislative Branch and Judicial Branch has set the priorities of our nation as we move forward.

The passage of the Navajo Nation Veterans Act is certainly a notable accomplishment, especially since it was done through collaboration between the Office of the President and Vice President, Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs, 23rd Navajo Nation Council, and most importantly, our Navajo veterans. We said that we would appoint a Navajo veteran to OPVP who would serve as a veterans liaison with our warriors and we achieved this when we selected Jamescita Peshlakai, a U.S. Army combat veteran, in July 2015. She was instrumental in getting the Veterans Act passed.

We recently made history

by signing into law the Navajo Nation Permanent Trust Fund Income Five-Year Expenditure Plan legislation.

This bill authorizes \$150 million from the Permanent Fund interest over a five-year period for infrastructure and economic development projects.

We are investing in projects that based in economic development, such as hotels, shopping centers, convenience stores and other revenue generators because they will create more money for the tribal budget in the form of taxes collected.

It is important that we are prudent with this money because we most always think of our future generations.

Vice President Nez and I also said that we would address the need for development in the Former Bennett Freeze Area to provide our Navajo families in the region relief from decades

of struggle since the Navajo-Hopi land dispute. We have toured the area and signed an agreement with the BIA to fast track the necessary surveys that are required before we request congressional funding. We also established an action team that is focused on housing, infrastructure, economic development and public safety.

As the country begins making their selections during the primary election for the top two candidates they believe are qualified to serve as President of the United States, we encourage our Navajo citizens to vote. This is your opportunity to select leaders who will advocate on behalf of the Navajo Nation on the national stage. We met with Sen. Bernie Sanders and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and expressed the concerns we have from the Navajo Nation with regard

to the federal government for consideration.

We are in the midst of the FY 2017 budget season on the Navajo Nation and we see the projected shortfall as an opportunity to restructure the tribal government and streamline services. Early on in our administration, we said that we would not be supporting layoffs. Instead, we will execute a hiring freeze and utilize the vacancies to ensure people are still able to work and support their families. We are also looking at the possibility of utilizing the Permanent Fund to cover some of these budget shortfalls.

There is still much more to be done and with your help, we will continue to be successful in our vision for the Navajo Nation. We thank you for your continued support and may God bless you. Ahéhee'!

VICE PRESIDENT JONATHAN NEZ MESSAGE

Yá'át'ééh!

President Begaye and I thank you for taking the time to read about the latest news from the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President. That past year in office has been an exciting time and we have worked hard to deliver on commitments we made to the Navajo people during the election. Through the four pillars of our administration we have accepted the mandate from the Navajo people to focus on these priority areas.

The Zika virus is an emerging public health threat that poses significant health risks to pregnant women.

Zika is not only a threat to the Navajo Nation, but the entire U.S., as well. On April 1, I attended the Zika Action Plan Summit at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention headquarters and returned home with information on how we could help to prevent spread

of this newfound virus.

OPVP has recorded public service announcements with the help of the CDC and Navajo Epidemiology Center for broadcast on KTNN AM 660 and other radio stations. Additionally, we have conducted public outreach at the chapter level for the people.

Our administration is also working to prevent funding reversions from N.M. Tribal Infrastructure Fund and capital outlay appropriations. These funds are crucial for infrastructure development in the Northern and Eastern Agencies of the Navajo Nation.

Recently, the Iyanbito Chapter celebrated the purchase of a new motor grader funded primarily with capital outlay funds from N.M.

The new motor grade with provide the community with road improvement and emergency services during the winter season.



These quality of life improvements were the purpose of the TIF and capital outlay appropriations by the state.

Before the start of the 2016 Navajo Nation Council Spring Session, President Begaye and I administered the oath of office for members of the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council.

This was another historic first for the Navajo Nation, which goes in tandem with the

Navajo Nation Veterans Act that was passed in Jan. 2016.

The advisory council members are from the five agencies and include female members because a large portion of our tribal veterans are female warriors.

Housing and healthcare for Navajo veterans are two major tasks for the advisory council.

The Navajo Youth Council has convened on a regular basis at the Training Center in Window Rock and I have been privileged to join our youth leaders for planning and discussion on the Navajo Nation Elder and Youth Summit planned for July 2016. These young men and women are the leaders of today, not tomorrow, and they are proactive in this initiative to bridge the generational gap between Navajo elders and youth. We also met with Navajo elders at the Twin Lakes Senior Citizens Center and many of

them expressed appreciation for the lunch and dinners provided by the center, including the variety of activities, including quilting. The center gives them an opportunity to socialize and get out of the house to meet with friends and the dedicated staff.

OPVP has also met with Phil Harrison and the Navajo Uranium Victims Committee to request a Congressional hearing for amendments to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act that has been stalled since 2007.

President Begaye and I thank you for your support. We have many great initiatives planned for announcement in the very near future. There's still much more work to be done and with your continued cooperation, we will achieve these many goals and objectives for the benefit of the future generations to come. God bless you and ahéhee'! ☉

PTF SIGNING



On May 7, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Nez made history once again by enacting the five-year expenditure plan for income from the Navajo Nation Permanent Trust Fund for infrastructure and economic development.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.-The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President hosted a May 7 signing ceremony with surviving members of the 15th Navajo Nation Council to commemorate enactment of the Navajo Nation Permanent Fund Income, Five-Year Expenditure Plan legislation.

The plan appropriates \$150 million dollars over a five-year time period to fund infrastructure and economic development projects.

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye told the former leaders that it is because of their foresight in looking toward the future that the Navajo Nation is able to sign off on the legislation to bring water, shopping centers and hospitals to Navajo communities.

“We have visionaries here today who put the Permanent Trust Fund in place. The men who put this vision together knew that when 20 years was over, the Navajo Nation would benefit from the interest of this trust fund,” President Begaye said.

Peterson Zah, OPVP Ambassador, and former chairman and president, provided the history behind the Permanent Trust Fund. Thirty-three years ago, he said, the council was made up of highly traditional people who adhered to Navajo traditions to guide their relationships and decision making.

“They worked very well together. They listened to each other and they talked together. There was a lot of respect and loyalty to each other. That was the way it worked and it resonated to the council,” he said.

The Permanent Trust Fund was a seed planted in 1985, when the Navajo Nation received a windfall of \$217 million from the Supreme Court of the United States decision in the Kerr-McGee v. Navajo Tribe case. The favorable ruling by the high court allowed the Navajo Nation to renegotiate coal, pipeline right-of-way, oil and gas leases with companies extracting natural resources on the Nation. This landmark decision increased royalty payments to the tribe.

“(The 15th NN Council) put the trust money away. They planted the seed and agreed they wouldn’t touch the money for 20 years to see how much they would make off the interest over 20 years,” Zah said. “The \$150 million doesn’t come out of the principal of the permanent fund. It comes from the interest that’s built.”

Vice President Jonathan Nez also thanked the 15th Navajo Nation Council for their foresight in setting up the Permanent Trust Fund and agreeing not to touch the money for 20 years. He noted that beyond the \$150 million that five-year plan appropriates, the Navajo Nation has earmarked an additional \$180 million for infrastructure projects.



FY 2017 BUDGET AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RESTRUCTURING, REORGANIZATION

The three branch chiefs of the Navajo Nation discuss the projected FY 2017 budget short fall at Quality Inn in Window Rock.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.— The Navajo Nation is facing yet another budget shortfall.

The significant drop in oil gas prices is to blame.

Coupled with declining revenues from the coal industry, the tribal coffers are looking at a deficit of about \$7 million for FY 2016. However, the real challenge facing the Navajo Nation is FY 2017, which is projected to be a shortfall of about \$24 million.

In 2015, the branch chiefs agreed to fund the FY 2016 tribal budget at \$172,654,000. That was the same amount as FY 2015.

However, oil and gas revenues for FY 2016 were projected at \$32 million, which was \$18 million less than the FY 2015 projection of \$50 million.

The precipitous drop in the price of a barrel of oil not only affected the Navajo Nation, but the U.S. federal government as well, destabilizing the economy in the process. The price of gas at the pump is at an all time low, much to the delight of travelers, but the revenues collected from the gas pump are also low.

President Russell Begaye said that it is imperative that the Navajo Nation strengthen the economy without increasing dependence on coal, oil, and gas revenues.

“We have to look at the

issues of infrastructure and establish how we can better bring electricity and water to areas in need of development,” he said.

Improving infrastructure for residential and business development will spur economic development. The enactment of water projects legislation in Feb. 2016 by President Begaye was to provide water and job opportunities to Navajo people.

He noted that the tribe must focus on funding economic development projects such as convenience stores, hotels, restaurants, and other businesses because they will generate taxes for the Navajo Nation economy. Tribal taxes have kept the budget afloat in recent years as natural resource revenues dwindled.

In FY 2012, tax revenues peaked at \$79,276,000. For FY 2017, the tax revenue projection is \$60,025,000. Creating new businesses can increase these tax revenues.

Vice President Jonathan Nez said the administration is going to implement a hiring freeze on non-essential vacant positions, including cutting down on travel and operating expenses to limit any layoffs from the tribal workforce.

“This budget deficit is also an opportunity for the tribal government to restructure, reorganize, and streamline how

we deliver direct services to the Navajo people,” he said.

The Office of the President and Vice President has established a restructuring taskforce, which has already convened at least three times in the past month.

The administration is also discussing solutions to the budget deficit with the tribal council, including utilization of performance-based budgeting, tapping into the Permanent Fund, or even utilization of the mandatory 10 percent set aside for the Permanent Fund.

“If we utilize the mandatory 10 percent set aside for the Permanent Fund, that will easily cover our deficit for FY 2016,” said Arbin Mitchell, OPVP Chief of Staff.

He said the remaining balance would be deposited into the Undesignated, Unreserved Fund Balance.

“The intent of the Permanent Fund was that it could be used to offset any budget shortfall for the tribe because coal and other natural resources are not always going to be there. Thirty years ago, this was put in place to cover any loss of revenue,” Mitchell said.

The budget season is underway and tribal leaders are working together to produce the FY 2017 Navajo Nation Comprehensive Budget for consideration before the fall session.

TWO NATIONS, ONE VOICE



Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Hopi Chairman Herman Honanie speak about working together.

PHOENIX-Ariz. Gov. Douglas Ducey, Sen. John McCain and Sen. Jeff Flake met with Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribal leadership on April 1 to discuss the Little Colorado River water rights issue.

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye, Speaker LoRenzo Bates and Hopi Chairman Herman Honanie pledged cooperation to address long-standing issues related to the Little Colorado River. The meeting also included a number of local and state government representatives, including non-Indian water users.

“We live in a thirsty land,” said Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye. “We cannot provide economic development for our people without a reliable water supply.”

Hopi Chairman Herman Honanie agreed and said, “Water is life for both tribes.” The state parties have pledged their cooperation to develop a settlement.

“Water is the defining issue for the future of our state,” said McCain. “We cannot have a predictable future without completing the Indian water settlements.”

Ducey said, “A water settlement for the Little Colorado River is a high strategic priority for Arizona.”

McCain and Flake agreed to introduce federal legislation to implement a water settlement if the parties reach agreement.

Significantly, Navajo and Hopi leaders pledged to cooperate to present a unified position.

“We are two nations, one voice,” said Hopi Chairman Honanie.

Navajo President Begaye pledged to move quickly.

“Both tribes are prepared to move forward to discuss settlement,” said President Begaye.

Bates also pledged to support negotiations and said, “Settlement for the Little Colorado is a high priority for the 23rd Navajo Nation Council.”

Councilman Alton Joe Shepherd added, “It’s not going to be easy, but we have learned from the previous attempt. Settlements are about compromise, but it needs to be done. Water rights is a priority of the Navajo Nation Council.”

Water rights to the Little Colorado River and its sources are the focus of the Little Colorado Water Rights Adjudication. The case was led in Apache County Superior Court in 1978 and involves nearly 2,000 claimants, including the U.S., Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, and the cities of Flagstaff, Winslow, and Holbrook. Farmers and ranchers throughout the Little Colorado River Basin are also included.

The Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe claim priority water rights. The case is ongoing.

President Begaye signs historic legislation to provide water and waste water services

WASHINGTON D.C.- On Feb. 22, President Russell Begaye signed into law the Water Projects Investment bill, the most comprehensive water and wastewater legislation in the history of the Navajo Nation.

“This is a historic day for the Navajo Nation. No other tribe has spent this amount of money to provide water to their people. All our communities will be impacted. We are doing this for ourselves and investing in our future,” President Begaye said. “The legislation will provide sufficient water and job opportunities to all communities throughout the Navajo Nation.

The signing was broadcast live on KTNN AM 660, during which President Begaye said the legislation is a \$180 million project that will use Navajo Nation funds to leverage bond financing.

By leveraging financing through loans to fund the project, President Begaye said the Navajo Nation will be able to retain more money for future investments and projects.

“Not only will this investment in our water infrastructure benefit our people for years to come, but thanks to innovative financing and leveraging, the vast majority of the principal will be retained for future

investments,” he said. “We researched and evaluated several options and plan to accomplish this through leveraged financing. Taking advantage of leveraged financing allows future years of the project to be financed through the earned interest. We will be working with the Navajo Nation Council to ensure the majority of the principal is retained for future investments.”

President Begaye said the legislation would foster economic development across the Navajo Nation as the need for infrastructure will involve the utilization of tribal enterprises like Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, along with the need for Navajo companies to be subcontracted.

“Infrastructure is the backbone for economic development,” President

Begaye said. “We will use our own Navajo Nation Office of Water Management while also working with other federal agencies like IHS, which will use their own money to assist this project.”

He acknowledged the work and efforts of the 22nd and 23rd Navajo Nation Council for moving the legislation forward. President Begaye was a former member of the Trust Mismanagement Sub-Committee under Naabik’iyati’ Committee in the 22nd Navajo Nation Council.

“We look forward to bringing reliable sources of water to our Navajo people while also providing jobs and economic development,” he said.

Ni’hima Nahasdáán Bahaahasin

NAVAJO NATION DIVISION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

- DNR Administration
- AML/UMTRA
- Agriculture Dept.
- Fish & Wildlife Dept.
- Forestry Dept.
- Historic Preservation Dept.

- Land Dept.
- Minerals Dept.
- Navajo Nation Museum
- Parks & Recreation Dept.
- Dept. of Resource Enforcement
- Dept. of Water Resources

Vice President Nez attends Iyanbito motor grader celebration

IYANBITO, N.M.—

Community members, tribal leaders, state lawmakers and elders gathered at Iyanbito Chapter House on March 11 to celebrate the delivery of a new motor grader.

The Caterpillar Model 120M2 Motor Grader was shipped on a diesel tractor-trailer from Little Rock, Ark. to Farmington, N.M. before finally reaching its destination.

“We have been waiting for over three years for this day to arrive,” exclaimed Jacynthia Nachin, community services coordinator for the chapter.

She said there is already a waiting list of more than 70 families that need the dirt roads leading to their homes graded.

The motor grader cost \$206,851 and was paid by funding from capital outlay resources from N.M. and funds from Iyanbito Chapter.

The crowd gathered around the tractor-trailer as chains holding the machinery in place were disconnected one by one. Finally, the motor grader was driven off the trailer and parked in the dirt for the traditional blessing ceremony.

Navajo medicine man Henry A. Yazzie provided the blessing ceremony, including songs and prayers for safe use of the heavy equipment and successful grading of community roads.

At the conclusion of his prayer, Navajo elders stood up to sprinkle corn pollen on the motor grader and to offer prayers of their own.

For most communities across the country, delivery of new heavy equipment would be just another daily activity. But not for the Navajo chapter of Iyanbito, located near the Continental Divide and nestled near the majestic red rocks of this area.

“This is a good example of a partnership between two lawmakers who have the authority to recommend state dollars and one of our Navajo chapters,” said Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez.



Left to right, Councilman Edmund Yazzie, NNDCC Director Carl Smith, Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon, Vice President Jonathan Nez, and Sen. George Munoz stand by the new motor grader for Iyanbito Chapter.

The fact that the chapter contributed funds, including in-kind contributions in the form of equipment research, request for proposals and bidding from Navajo Division of Transportation, demonstrates empowerment and cooperation, he said.

“There’s true partnership here, we’re not just wanting the equipment to be given to us,” Vice President Nez said in reference to Gov. Susana Martinez’s decision earlier in the week to veto funding in House Bill 219 for Navajo Nation infrastructure projects.

Two members of the N.M. Legislature worked together to secure funding for purchase of the new heavy equipment for Iyanbito Chapter.

Sen. George Munoz, D-Dist. 4, agreed with Vice President Nez that the new motor grader was a successful use of state capital outlay funds to help rural N.M.

“(Gov. Martinez) doesn’t really understand that people out here are still hauling water and that these capital outlay resources are so vital to people,” Munoz said.

His colleague in the House was more outspoken about the governor’s reasoning. Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon, D-Dist. 6, said the governor’s decision to veto capital outlay and Tribal Infrastructure Funds from the Navajo Nation was unfair and

done out of vengeance.

In a world where the governor spends \$25,000 for a coffeemaker and she vetoes \$90,000 for bathroom additions for Navajo communities, it just doesn’t make any sense, he noted.

“Her lifestyle is such that she has no idea how we and our constituents live. It is totally unfair and it is wrong,” Alcon said.

Navajo Nation Councilman Edmund Yazzie was thankful for the new motor grader and said it would be useful for clearing snowy roads and for maintenance of dirt roads in the chapter area.

“Not all of our roads are paved, so the need is there. We don’t have the luxury of people who live in the city and metropolitan areas,” Yazzie said. “I’d like to invite Gov. Martinez to visit our chapter.”

The new motor grader’s main capability is road repair and improvement.

In the winter, it is useful for snow removal on roads. It has an average lifespan of 20,000 hours and Iyanbito Chapter residents are committed to its maintenance and upkeep.

For one Navajo community in northwest N.M., the new motor grader is a quality of life improvement that will benefit hundreds of families in the area, the intent and purpose of capital outlay dollars from the state.

NAVAJO NATION DIVISION UPDATES

Controller’s Office moves forward with investments

The Navajo Nation Office of the Controller continues work with the master investment project, which provides review of new investment opportunities in the permissible asset classes, including master limited partnerships, hedge funds, private equity, additional fixed income, and non-core real estate.

Other investments include the *Sihasin* Fund, which currently has all dollars fully invested in the markets. OOC notes that with the passage of projects funded by the *Sihasin* Fund, it will be necessary to determine the drawing down of these funds to expend on the project listing. Currently projecting completion by summer 2016.

OMB focused on FY 2017 budget process

The Office of Management and Budget is reviewing the FY 2016 budget development process for recommended changes to the FY 2017 budget process, including development of alternatives to improve the process. The office is also working on implementing five-year expenditure plans for the *Sihasin* Fund and Permanent Fund.

The budget section of OMB is currently reviewing and processing an average of 10 to 20 budget revision requests per week for the FY 2016 budget revisions. Additionally, an average of 20 to 30 164 Review documents are being reviewed each week.

Office of Hearings and Appeals conduct hearings

For the second quarter of FY 2016, the Office of hearings and appeals has conducted administrative hearings for 27 non-child support cases, closing 9 cases and opening 49 new cases. These included 3 land boundaries and fence appeal cases; 3 grazing rights cases, 3 home site lease cases, 5 tribal personnel grievance cases, 16 ethics and rules cases, 2 EPA cases, 2 election grievances cases, 2 Department of Self-Reliance cases, 2 tax cases, 9 NNPEA cases, and 6 pro bono cases assigned by the Navajo Nation Family Courts.

Additionally, there were 1,088 open child support cases from the previous quarter, 908 enforcement orders were signed, 1,512 paternity orders were established, 421 new paternity cases were established, 220 administrative hearings were conducted, 86 cases were closed, and 123 new cases were filed.

NNWO planning to bring original Treaty of 1868 to Navajo Nation

The Navajo Nation Washington Office, in coordination with the Navajo Nation Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian, is working on bringing the original Treaty of 1868 to the Navajo Nation for the 150th anniversary of its signature.

President Russell Begaye had an opportunity to see the original Naaltssoos Sání, which is housed at the National Archives. Discussions of bringing the document to the Navajo Nation began in June 2015, while President Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez toured the Treaty of 1868 exhibit at the National Museum of the American Indian on Navajo Nation Treaty Day.

Capital Improvement Office moves ahead with NN projects

There are currently 46 Navajo Nation-funded projects underway with the Capital Improvement Office. Thirteen projects have been closed and 33 projects are currently active. The Coyote Canyon bathroom additions project is awaiting funding reallocation for project balance of \$2,927. The power line extension project for Coyote Canyon has a balance of \$1,186 and will be combined with N.M. Capital Outlay and Tribal Infrastructure Funds.

Dilkon Chapter recently passed a resolution to reallocate \$107,331 for proposed office complex. The Indian Wells house wiring and bathroom additions project is 55 percent complete. Community Housing and Infrastructure Department is the lead agent for this project and is anticipating final inspections on the home for April 2016 for project closeout.

NNDSR Subsidized Summer Youth Employment Program

The Navajo Nation Department for Self-Reliance has initiated the Subsidized Summer Youth Employment Program to provide Navajo youth with an opportunity to work. The employers pay for youth to work in their respective organizations and DSR reimburses 100 percent of youth wages, fringe benefits and other related costs.

The program targets youth served by the DSR between the ages of 14 to 16 and is an allowable cost under the tribal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families regulations.

Navajo School Clothing Program releases RFP

The Navajo School Clothing Program released its request for proposal for the 2016-2017 school year for clothing purchase and received only one bid. The evaluation is complete and the contract will soon be executed. Approximately 22,300 students from 514 schools, including schools outside the Navajo Nation, will be served by the program. Emergency assistance requests for clothing continue to be accepted by the program.

President Begaye signs Navajo Nation Veterans Act into law

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—Today, the 23rd Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved the Navajo Nation Veterans Act of 2016, which will establish the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration and Advisory Council. “The Begaye-Nez administration has committed the efforts of pertinent departments and resources to pushing this legislation forward and having it approved by the Navajo Nation Council,” Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye said. “By communicating directly with commanders at the agency and local level, hand-in-hand with our veterans, we were able to accomplish what no other administration before has been able to do.”

Until now, the Office of the President and Vice President presented the Veterans Act through public outreach meetings held in communities across the Navajo Nation under the direction of Jamescita Peshlakai, veterans liaison for OPVP.

The schedule of public hearings provided veterans the opportunity to comment and make critical suggestions toward creating a veterans administration that would be most beneficial to them.

“President Begaye and I promised the veterans that we would get the Veterans Act approved and we made good on our word,” Vice President Nez said. “We committed to creating a veteran’s liaison position within OPVP, which we did with Jamescita Peshlakai.

“We commend her for her coordination of the

public outreach meetings. To see the passage of the Veteran’s Act is a credit to her efforts and the involvement of Navajo veterans,” he added.

Peshlakai said the passing of the legislation is truly significant for all indigenous people, as they have been protectors of their traditional homelands for centuries.

“This Veterans Act provides our veterans the opportunity to mold services and benefits with our culture, traditions, and language for the purpose of taking care of our warriors who have returned from service,” she said.

Peshlakai added that the Veterans Act is inclusive of all returning warriors, including men, women, disabled, or challenged.

“It creates a family community that our suffering warriors can return to and be embraced in,” she said.

The legislation establishes a veterans administration which will enhance outreach to Navajo veterans, as well as services and benefits. It also establishes a veterans advisory council that encourages veteran participation in policy matters.

Edsel Pete, department manager for the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs, said the Veterans Act provides an opportunity for the veterans to come to the table to help shape policy that affects their services and benefits.

“It’s an opportunity to instill hope in veterans across the Navajo Nation.

It’s also an opportunity to create an interface of

resources for veterans and services,” he said. “We would like to thank the veterans for their involvement and support. The support of OPVP was crucial as well.”

The Veterans Act establishes the veterans administration under OPVP, including an advisory council consisting of 11 members from each agency.

Theresa Galvin, department manager for the Department of Behavioral Health Services, said in addition to enhancing veterans services, the veterans administration will meet critical demand of services for veterans, which have gone unfulfilled until now.

“We are going to mark this monumental occasion with a celebratory signing because it’s what our veterans deserve,” President Begaye said. “This is just the beginning of our administration’s commitment to fulfilling the objectives of our pillars. The top pillar is to serve our Navajo veterans.”

The Navajo Nation Veterans Act of 2016, Legislation No. 0006-16, was sponsored by councilman Jonathan Hale and co-sponsored by councilman Edmund Yazzie. The Veterans Act passed unanimously by a vote of 20-0.



VETERANS ACT SIGNING CEREMONIES



The 23rd Navajo Nation Council unanimously passed the Navajo Nation Veterans Act by a vote of 20-0. President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez conducted signing ceremonies for the historic legislation in each of the five agencies.



After passage of the historic Navajo Nation Veterans Act of 2016, President Begaye and Vice President Nez conducted signing ceremonies across the nation, much to the pleasure of Navajo veterans and their families.



President Begaye and Vice President Nez appointed U.S. Army combat veteran Jamescita Peshlakai to serve as the veterans liaison for the Office of the President and Vice President. Edsel Pete, department manager for the Navajo Department of Veterans Affairs, is now working directly under the OPVP.

President Begaye, Vice President Nez deliver State of the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez emphasized the need to build infrastructure and economic development, as they delivered the State of the Navajo Nation before the 23rd Navajo Nation Council spring session.

President Begaye said the administration is working to improve infrastructure across the Navajo Nation to benefit housing conditions and support economic development. He also emphasized the need for the tribe to develop an economy that isn't driven by non-renewable resource industry.

"It's imperative that we strengthen our economy without furthering our dependence on coal, oil, and gas revenues," he said. "To strengthen our economy we have to look at the issues of infrastructure and establish how we can better bring electricity and water to areas in need of development."

President Begaye and Vice President Nez stressed the importance of economic development to combat the current decline in oil, gas, and coal revenues.

"We need to incorporate innovative technology, diversify our economic base, and establish partnerships with an array of entities on and off the Navajo Nation to find solutions to our economic challenges," President Begaye said. "We must work together as a diplomatic team to generate new funding sources for the Navajo Nation."

President Begaye talked about restructuring the Executive Branch to consider merging programs and re-evaluating certain departments for savings in light of projected budget shortfalls.

"The low cost of oil and gas coupled with the hit that the coal industry is currently experiencing has affected our revenue," he said.

President Begaye said a projected Navajo Nation of \$25 million is because of the decline in gas prices. He said capping the Undesignated, Unreserved Fund Balance was a possible remedy.

"We are looking at about a 12 percent budget cut for FY 2017, maybe more," he said. "We also have to put a cap on the UUFB."

Vice President Nez asked the tribal council to support the Permanent Trust Fund five-year expenditure plan aimed at implementing economic development projects across the Navajo Nation.

"Through the duration of five years, the plan commits \$150 million for economic development projects like waterlines, development and construction of shopping centers, hotels and restaurants, and office buildings and agricultural projects," Vice President Nez said.

The first two years of the five-year plan include development of the Ganado Shopping Center, Nahatadzil Shopping Center, Shonto Convenience Store and Hotel Project, Dennehotso Retail Center, and Northern Agency

Agriculture Project.

"Any excess funds not spent during each year will go to the general fund to cover budgetary shortfalls," he said.

Although infrastructure and economic development were prominent topics, President Begaye reaffirmed that Navajo veterans are a top priority with the administration and the passing of the Navajo Nation Veterans Act was monumental and historic.

"This Veterans Act is the first of its kind across all tribal nations and it sets a precedence for others to follow," he said.

The passing of the Veterans Act set into motion the establishment of the Veterans Advisory Council and Veterans Administration as offices under OPVP.

Priorities for both offices include veterans housing, improved access to medical benefits, improved behavioral health services to address post-traumatic stress disorder, and the establishment of a Navajo Nation Veterans Hospital.

President Begaye acknowledged the newly sworn-in members of the Veterans Advisory Council who were seated in the gallery. The advisory council's primary responsibility is to advise the president and executive director of the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs in serving Navajo veterans.

President Begaye and Vice President Nez also broadcast the State of the Navajo Nation live on KTNN AM 660 for those who could not attend.

Veterans Advisory Council members take oath of office at OPVP

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez administered the oath of office for members of the newly established Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council on April 18.

The appointment of members to the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council was the next step after enactment of the Navajo Nation Veterans Act on Feb. 13. Establishing the plan of operations and budget for the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration is next.

President Begaye said, "This is a historical moment for the Navajo Nation and all of Indian Country. (The Begaye-Nez administration) continues to keep our promise to Navajo veterans."

He noted that the NNVAC is going to have two major tasks to address for veterans – housing and healthcare.

"Not only physical health, but mental health. We need to get really strong professionals and staff here on the Nation, rather than farming out these services around the country," President Begaye said.

Eight new members of the advisory council are comprised of five agency commanders and three female veterans. The new members are Darryl Ahasteen, Gilbert Chee, Anderson Tullie, Hubert Smith, Paul George, Tyann Nakai, Regina Roanhorse, and Nancy Martin.

Vice President Nez said people consistently ask what the difference was for the Begaye-Nez administration to successfully pass the Navajo Nation Veterans Act with the support of the Navajo Nation Council.

"The difference is that the veterans were involved. You were all at the table, having a dialogue on how you wanted to shape your Veterans Act. Before, it got created in Window Rock and they tried to push it on you guys, that's why it didn't work," he said.

President Begaye spoke of the need to assist the invisible veterans that are unheard from by the Navajo Nation.

"Some are out in the street. They're out there, in need of help. The unseen veterans, they're ones we need to spend more time helping," he said. "They are the most neglected of all the veterans that are out there."

These homeless veterans struggle with the challenges of homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder, unemployment and other issues.

In the coming months, the Office of the President and Vice President, along with the NNVAC, will create the plan of operation, policies, and procedures, for the veterans administration and the advisory council.

To ensure transparency and public input, OPVP will implement a public outreach campaign in a similar fashion to what was executed for the Navajo Nation Veterans Act public hearings.

All divisions, departments, programs, and enterprises will be called upon to assist with the establishment of the new veterans administration. A preliminary organizational structure, budget, personnel listing, and operational plan are going to be completed by the summer session of the tribal council.

By Oct. 2016, the NNVA and NNVAC will be transitioning toward presenting the Navajo Nation Council with a proposed budget for the first year.

President Begaye spoke of the tremendous responsibilities bestowed upon the advisory council, such as veterans housing, establishing a veterans hospital on the Navajo Nation, creation of a national veterans cemetery, and development of a recognized Navajo Nation Veterans Museum.

Veterans are one of the four pillars in the Begaye-Nez administration. President Begaye and Vice President Nez stand committed to assisting tribal members who took the oath and served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

"We are thankful and forever indebted to our Navajo veterans. By installing our new advisory council members, we continue to show our Navajo Nation veterans that we are committed to them," said President Begaye.

Vice President Nez said, "We need to applaud President Begaye because appointing a veterans liaison within OPVP and enactment of the Navajo Nation Veterans Act are two campaign promises we made. I stand proudly with him to say these promises can now be checked off as implemented."

BEGAYE-NEZ ADMINISTRATION SUPPORTS PUSH FOR RECA AMENDMENTS HEARING



The RECA update meeting at Shiprock Chapter was packed to capacity with affected families and former workers.

SHIPROCK, N.M.—On March 8, the Navajo Uranium Radiation Victims Committee convened at the Shiprock Chapter House to provide an update on the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2015.

Since Jan. 17, 2016, Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez has met four times with the committee, led by Phil Harrison, to discuss advancing two companion congressional bills for the RECA amendments, HR 994 and S. 331.

He spoke about the efforts to conduct a hearing on the amendments to a full chapter house audience and provided his remarks in Navajo for the many tribal elders in attendance.

Vice President Nez said the two bills have not moved since 2007 because of two reasons.

“First, the amendments are estimated to cost about \$1 billion. Second, the vast majority of cosponsors are Democrats. Because Republicans control the Senate and House, they are unlikely to advance either bill, even for a hearing,” he said.

The Office of the President and Vice President will continue to highlight the importance of a hearing on the amendments, Vice President Nez added, noting that the Begaye-Nez administration will take a four-step approach.

Letters were sent to corresponding congressional committees requesting hearings on the RECA amendments bill to begin the dialogue. The Navajo Nation Washington Office will continue to push for a congressional hearing.

“We are also asking specific Republican senators and congressmen to cosponsor the legislation because other states such as Idaho, Wyoming, and Oregon stand to benefit,” Vice President Nez said. “However, there are still some Republicans from these states who have yet to sign on to the bill.

“I’ve instructed our Washington office to continue to lobby these offices to sign the bill and advance it before the next Congress,” he added.

OPVP will also provide a public awareness campaign to remind Congress and the Navajo people the extreme importance of the RECA amendments, as thousands of lives are at stake.

Finally, OPVP will continue to meet the committee to listen to suggestions and provide support for the

affected Navajo workers and families.

“We encourage you to write letters to the House Judiciary Committee and request a hearing. We’ve distributed a draft letter you can personalize and send to your legislators,” Vice President Nez said.

From 1945 to 1962, the U.S. conducted about 200 atmospheric nuclear weapons testing during the height of the Cold War. Uranium mining and processing was intrinsic to this process and was carried out by tens of thousands of workers.

These workers filed class action lawsuits after 1962, claiming exposure to known radiation hazards, but appellate courts dismissed the claims.

Congress responded by devising a program allowing partial restitution to individuals who developed serious illnesses after radiation exposure.

On Oct. 5, 1990, the RECA was passed and the scope of coverage was broadened in 2000.

Monetary compensation is provided to individuals who contracted certain cancers and other serious diseases following exposure to radiation released during atmospheric nuclear weapons testing and resulting from occupational exposure from employment in the uranium industry.

“The RECA amendments were originally drafted in 2003 and introduced to Congress, but it hasn’t gone anywhere,” Harrison said.

In Feb. 2015, the bill was moved to the House Judiciary Committee.

Harrison said the uranium victims committee is worried that Congress will lose interest if the Navajo Nation does not continue to advocate for the amendments.

“It’s been more than 16 years and we’re not getting anywhere. We need to have a community level uranium summit to discuss these issues,” he said.

Uranium workers are frustrated that they are not getting monetary increases for impairment they’ve suffered from uranium exposure, Harrison said, adding that many of these Navajos are 80 to 90 years old.

“These doctors don’t know the reservation. The burden of proof on these claims falls on the patients. It’s like you need to have one foot in the grave to qualify,” he said.

U.S. EPA TRIBAL CONSULTATION ON ABANDONED URANIUM MINES

TSE BONITO, N.M.—Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez met with representatives from the U.S. EPA, U.S. Department of Energy, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and Indian Health Services.

This consultation meeting was a continuing discussion of federal action to address impacts of uranium contamination on the Navajo Nation. As the first five-year plan comes to completion, the tribe and EPA are entering the second five-year plan, and outlining the five major objectives.

President Begaye asked the group that if they have the ability to control the funds settled through lawsuits, then why are these funds still funneling through federal government to provide the Navajo people with cleanup of contaminated uranium mine sites?

“We want to administer and have oversight on how these funds are expended. This would ensure that our people affected by uranium contamination will receive funding and no pass through,” he said.

Navajo EPA Director, Dr. Donald Benn, asked about the possibility of creating a Navajo Region.

“I understand EPA Region 9 also provides services and consultation to 150 other tribal nations,” he said. “We are a large nation and there is no comparison to a small tribe with only 400 members.

“Therefore, we need

our own region,” he said.

Benn said the Navajo Nation wants decision-making authority for tribal members and to become independent.

EPA presented information on progress for abandoned uranium mines cleanup on the Navajo Nation from 2008 to 2016. Nine mines had emergency cleanup action taken for the provision of safe drinking water for 3,013 homes and remediation for protection of tribal members at 47 homes containing radioactive material.

During the 2008 to 2016 timeframe, EPA created safe jobs for Navajo workers and provided opportunities for Navajo businesses.

Vice President Nez said the Navajo Nation has a high unemployment rate and that one of the four pillars of the Begaye-Nez administration is job creation for our Navajo people.

“As we sit here, under formal consultation, we are expressing a great need for you to employ our Navajo people and Navajo-owned businesses to assist with this clean up process,” he said.

President Begaye said large national and international companies are asking the Navajo Nation to assist with the clean up process.

“Their only concern is the money they will be earning through this deal. We must hire our own Navajo businesses to do this work because there is a sincere commitment to do this job correctly and safely for our people,” he said.

Begaye-Nez administration prioritizes Former Bennett Freeze Area development

TONALEA, Ariz.— For Former Bennett Freeze Area families, *T'áá hó ájtéego* or self-reliance, is more than governmental rhetoric, it is a way of life for the Navajo people.

On March 4, Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez traveled to Tonalea to celebrate completion of the White Mesa power line project, which brought electricity to 16 families that have been immobilized by the federal government's policy to ban development in the area since the mid-1960s.

The celebration took place at the home of the late Floyd and Susie Whiterock. Their children and grandchildren now occupy the modest dwelling, surrounded by other family members who live nearby.

New power line erected by construction crews from Navajo Tribal Utility Authority stretched for miles throughout the desolate area that remained untouched due to a land dispute between the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe.

In 2006, the Bennett Freeze was lifted and Congress formally repealed the policy in 2009, opening the door for development in the area.

The Begaye-Nez administration has made development in the FBFA a top priority and is currently planning projects through an action team that includes housing and infrastructure subgroups.

President Russell Begaye said, "For decades, our Navajo

families in the Bennett Freeze have survived overwhelming odds, hauling water, doing homework by the illumination of a flashlight, and protecting themselves against the elements in homes that could not be repaired because of unjust federal policies."

"We stand committed to improving the quality of life for our Navajo families in the Former Bennett Freeze Area and fast tracking infrastructure projects that will provide electricity and water to families," said President Begaye. "We have heard your pleas and they will not go unheard."

Leveraging funding from the federal government and the Navajo Nation is crucial to development in the area and the administration is reviewing other outside partners, including a home building philanthropist from Texas.

Vice President Nez said the ceiling amount for tribes applying for funding from the Indian Community Development Block Grant program from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is \$5.5 million. It is an amount the Navajo Nation has been fortunate to receive over the years.

"We have to determine which projects are construction ready. With Tonalea, their project was ready," he said.

President Russell Begaye and Vice President Nez previously served on the 22nd Navajo Nation Council and voted in support of various Ariz. infrastructure



projects like the Tonalea power line, Steamboat Bear Springs power line, and Inscription House *To'Hajilchi'li* power line.

The White Mesa power line project was packaged with other projects, Vice President Nez said, and was funded with dollars from Navajo Nation Community Development Block Grant program and supplemental appropriations from the tribal council.

"It's great to see the reality of power lines coming into the Former Bennett Freeze Area," he said. "President Begaye and our team are making the Bennett Freeze a priority for our administration."

Vice President Nez encouraged other chapters in the FBFA to be proactive in community land use planning, house wiring projects and other activities with the community members. These pre-development activities move infrastructure

construction along swiftly, he said.

James Adakai, program manger for CDBG, gave appreciation for the 22nd Navajo Nation Council, NTUA and the chapter for completion of the projects.

"Thank you for working with the CDBG program on these three projects that were completed with matching funds," Adakai said.

Darryl Jim, chapter president, said the next major project for Tonalea is Phase II of Wildcat Peak power line extension, a \$1.3 million project that will serve 26 families. Other projects include Phase II of White Mesa power line, which will serve 11 families, and the Saguaro Wash power line project.

The White Mesa power line project cost \$441,589 and was funded by CDBG appropriations from FY 2008. CDBG contributed \$314,224 and supplemental funding

from the Undesignated, Unreserved Fund Balance amounting to \$127,365 was approved in 2015 to complete the project. Construction began in Dec. 2014 and the project was completed March 4.

While the infrastructure development is slowly growing, decades of oppression from the freeze still stymie quality of life improvements for Navajo families in the area.

One woman waited a lifetime to see her home powered by electricity.

Lavania Begay is the daughter of Floyd and Susie Whiterock and said she was born into the Bennett Freeze.

"This house was built by my mom and dad in 1962 and we maintain this home in memory of them," she said.

Long deceased, her parents raised seven children in the home, teaching their kids the value of resilience and self-determination in a land long forgotten by the federal government.

Begay said the home was connected with water in 2008, but her parents never got to see the quality of life improvements they prayed for after decades of strife.

"My parents didn't see the electricity or the running water. My cheii, Harry Jim, passed away and he was hoping for electricity. He died in December. This has happened to a lot of people," she said. "But we're so thankful and appreciative of the power line."

Born on March 13, 1960, Begay said survival was common theme

throughout her life, making due with kerosene lamps first, then solar power, which was spotty, at best. Her family bought ice five times a week to keep food cold and hauled water for bathing, cooking, drinking, and to maintain livestock.

"My parents passed on. Now, it's us: our kids and our grandkids. That's four generations that are still suffering from the Bennett Freeze. People have everything today, but we're still living like a third world country out here," Begay said.

Families in the area are looking forward to new homes, she said, explaining that many youth have moved away because of the economically depressing conditions.

"I was born into the Bennett Freeze and lived it all my life. It's still going on. We're not there yet. I still think of it as frozen. We have a long way to go," she said.

Her hope is that new home construction will bring her kids back, including her oldest son, who lives and works out of his truck, employed as a non-medical emergency transport driver.

"Our kids leave because there's no jobs, no opportunities, no homes. I guess to them, it's like there's nothing out here. I want my kids and grandkids to move back," Begay said. "Without our friends and relatives, we probably wouldn't make it."

"We help one another and take care of each other. That's what we do out here," she added.

PRESIDENT BEGAYE: NAVAJO FARMERS SUFFERING FROM GOLD KING MINE SPILL DESERVE COMPENSATION

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs convenes in Phoenix to hear testimony on the aftermath of the disaster



President Russell Begaye reported before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs during a hearing held in Phoenix on April 22. He said Navajo farmers devastated by the Gold King Mine spill have still not been compensated and made whole by the U.S. EPA.

PHOENIX—On April 22, 2016, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye testified before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs regarding the Gold King Mine spill. President Begaye reported that Navajo farmers are still suffering and that the Navajo Nation is still waiting on the U.S. EPA to reimburse farmers.

President Begaye was

joined by 23rd Navajo Nation Council Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Hopi Chairman Herman Honanie and U.S. EPA Assistant Administrator Mathy Stanislaus.

In his written testimony, President Begaye stated that the EPA has repeatedly questioned the Navajo Nation's demands. In the eight months since the

spill, he said the EPA has avoided any real sense of accountability for its actions.

President Begaye stated that the EPA hasn't fully compensated the Navajo Nation for the harms suffered as a result of the spill; designated the Upper Animas Mining District as a Superfund site; implemented a comprehensive plan

ensuring against future contamination of Navajo land or waters; or provided the Navajo Nation with tools to address the existing harms or to mitigate future harms.

He maintained that the EPA should not make empty promises, but instead act upon what they say they're doing.

"It's like the thunder without the rain," said President Begaye.

The Navajo Nation has requested for more than \$2 million dollars in expenses to be reimbursed, yet the EPA only offered \$157,000 totaling less than 8 percent of expenses incurred. The amount was offered as a grant and not recognized as reimbursement.

Additionally, President Begaye's written statement listed 8 requests, including

a fair and independent assessment of the role the EPA played in events leading up to the Gold King Mine Spill; resources to conduct the Navajo Nation's own monitoring, testing and assessment of water, soil and crops; funds dedicated to emergency preparedness for future environmental disasters; the EPA's full support of listing the Upper Animas Mining District on the National Priorities List; and resources to re-stabilize farming along the San Juan River.

During the hearing, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said the Senate Committee would continue hearings until all questions are answered and compensation was awarded to the Navajo Nation.

"An economic analyst told the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs that the Navajo

Nation lost \$982,000 in agriculture production during the first two weeks of the spill," McCain said. "Including costs from the disaster, these costs could reach upward of \$335 million."

McCain also said that because of the EPA's lack of action and forthright involvement, a criminal investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice is merited and should occur.

President Begaye thanked McCain and Sen. John Barrasso III, R-Wyo., for the Senate Committee hearing and the suggestion of a U.S. DOJ criminal investigation.

"Navajo Farmers are still waiting for compensation. They have not received a penny," President Begaye said. "EPA made promises, but the farmers have yet to be compensated."

Little Colorado River Gorge half-marathon, 10K runs garner hundreds of runners for Navajo Parks Race Series first event for 2016

LITTLE COLORADO RIVER GORGE, Ariz.—It was not a course for the weak.

On Feb. 6, more than 100 runners participated in the Little Colorado River Half Marathon and 10K runs, which traversed hilly, rocky terrain along scenic canyon walls that are the gateway to the Grand Canyon.

The run was the first of the 2016 Navajo Parks Race Series, which was organized in 2015 by the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President, Navajo Youth Empowerment Services, Navajo Parks and Recreation Department, and the Division of Natural Resources.

Vice President

Jonathan Nez, an avid running enthusiast, worked with Tom Riegenbach, executive director of Navajo YES, to organize the race series, which showcases the scenic beauty of tribal parks located on the Navajo Nation.

"I want to say thank you to all our runners here and all of the support staff for our runners out there," Vice President Nez said before the start of the race.

Acknowledging the leadership of President Russell Begaye, he said health and wellness was an integral part of the Begaye-Nez administration.

"Congratulations to the participants that



competed in all of the Navajo Parks Race Series in 2015. We encourage you to join us again for 2016, as we kickoff the series here at the Little Colorado River Gorge, a hidden gem on our Nation," Vice President Nez said.

The next runs scheduled on the series include the Shiprock Marathon in May, Asaayi Mountain Runs in

August, Code Talker 29K in September, Rainbow Bridge Trail Ultra Marathon in October, Monument Valley Marathon in November, and Four Corners Quad Keyah Marathons in December.

Vice President Nez said, "This is an opportunity to showcase the scenic wonders of our Navajo Nation with the rest of the world. Thank

you for your participation and be sure to take a look around while you're running."

John Yazzie from Chinle, Ariz. came in first place for the LCR 10K with a time of 45:15. Cal Skilsky of Oro Valley, Ariz. came in first place for the LCR Half Marathon with a time of 01:30:09.

There were a total of 170 participants, 52 percent of which were female and 48 percent were male. A total of 71 participants competed in the 10K run, with 61 people finishing the race. There were 99 participants for the half marathon, with 93 finishers.

All participants

received a long sleeve turquoise shirt with LCR emblazoned on the front and the run information listed on the back. They also received posters, snacks, drinks, and a hot lunch at the conclusion of the runs.

Awards were given to overall runners and overall age group runners. Half marathon finishers also received medals.

Funds from the race series benefit Navajo YES, a non-profit organization based on the Navajo Nation to empower Navajo youth.

For more information and race results from the 10K and half-marathon, please visit: www.mangledmomentum.com

Building Communities of Hope travels to more than 25 schools across the Navajo Nation

THOREAU, N.M.—The Building Communities of Hope Tour is an initiative executed by the Office of the President and Vice President and departments of the Navajo Nation Executive Branch. To date, the suicide prevention tour has traveled to more than 25 schools across the Navajo Nation and surrounding border town communities.

On Dec. 14, 2015, the six-day tour began at Thoreau High School. The purpose of the initiative is for suicide prevention awareness at schools and communities across the Navajo Nation.

High rates of suicide across Indian Country and the Navajo Nation indicate that suicide is an epidemic that warrants immediate attention. OPVP has addressed this

epidemic through the Building Communities of Hope Tour.

“Our youth will lead us into the future. We must do everything we can to let them know they are special and that they are loved. We need to protect our youth and continue to instill positivity and self-confidence in them,” said President Russell Begaye.

Vice President Jonathan Nez said, “We are hitting the road to show the Navajo people that we mean business. One life taken is one life too many in our eyes.”

Jessie McKenzie and T.J. Anderson of the Department of Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Health Services led the program with a presentation addressing questions and answers about suicide



prevention and awareness.

McKenzie asked, “Are you thinking about hurting yourself or killing yourself?”

She told students that if they are hurting, they need to voice their pain and talk with someone they trust or feel they can confide in.

“Don’t be afraid to ask questions,” she said. “Speak up, reach out and know that you are not alone. Seek help from an adult you trust and don’t

give up. Keep asking until someone helps you.”

McKenzie and Anderson recommended that the affected youth should speak with teachers, school counselors, nurses, parents or friends. In critical situations, those who are considering suicide, and those who know someone that might be considering suicide, should call the nearest Navajo Police Department dispatch and provide

adequate information.

Echohawk Lefthand, a motivational speaker from Red Mesa, said that suicide has been a big problem in the area where he comes from. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem, he told the students.

“We all go through problems and we all face difficult situations in our lives,” he said. “When we take difficult situations and turn them into positive things, we are able to grow through them.”

Lefthand shared that he lost one of his best friends to suicide. His friend was a positive person who had great charisma. He wasn’t someone who seemed like he would consider suicide.

“He told me that he had been thinking about suicide and I couldn’t

believe it,” he said. “I asked him how he could think like that?”

Ultimately, Lefthand’s friend took his own life, which in turn caused him to fall into depression. The impacts of suicide among the victim’s family and friends can be lingering, deep-rooted and traumatic.

The tour’s presentation included support and counseling services for those who have lost loved ones. Lefthand talked about his need to seek counseling in dealing with the grief he was feeling. Resources are available and were part of the topics discussed.

“The only way to get over depression is to go through it. You’re going to cry but you have to go through it,” he said.

The tour continues.

NAVAJO NATION ECONOMIC SUMMIT FOCUSED ON SEPARATION OF POLITICS FROM TRIBAL BUSINESS

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—Many successful tribal business enterprises, corporations, native entrepreneurs, business development professionals, and tribes from throughout the nation will gather at Twin Arrows Navajo Casino and Resort from April 11 to 14, to share successful business practices, dialogue on strategies, launch business partnerships and collaborate on opportunities.

The opening day’s keynote speaker is Lance Morgan, a member of the Winnebago Tribe of Neb.

In 1994, the tribe realized that gaming was not a long-term solution to the Tribe’s overall goal

of (economic) prosperity. In response, the tribe formed Ho-Chunk, Inc. with gaming funds and appointed Morgan as the CEO. Today, the company has revenues in excess of \$260 million with more than 1,000 employees, operations in 16 states and 8 foreign countries, and operation of 35 subsidiaries.

In a recent newspaper interview regarding his upcoming presentation, he shared that his company is successful because of its size. The Winnebago Tribe has 5,500 members and has a policy that prevents the tribal council from interfering with the company’s operations.

Morgan said it benefits the company because

the council leaves them alone. The tribe’s accomplishment has attracted a lot of interest from tribal governments, including the Navajo Nation.

Other featured speakers include Dr. Manley Begay, a professor at Northern Arizona University, who will talk about “Developing Tribal Economies,” and Dr. Raymond Austin, a professor at University of Arizona and former associate justice on the Navajo Supreme Court.

On April 13, Austin will share his insight on the role of the court system in business. Other successful tribal corporations including Southern

Ute Growth Fund, NANA Development Corporation, Wild Horse Pass Development Authority, a global corporate site selection strategist, and aerospace industry executives will be presenting.

Director of the Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development, Crystal Deschinny, said the economic summit will provide an opportunity to refine and optimize Navajo Nation enterprises and corporations while learning from tribes that have created successful business models.

“We can’t depend on our coal, oil and gas revenues anymore,” said Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye. “We



need to incorporate innovative technology, diversity our economic base and establish partnerships with an array of entities on and off the Navajo Nation, and find solutions to our economic challenges.”

About 600 people have registered for the summit. A golf tournament will kick off the event on April

11. A welcome reception April 11 and banquet on April 12 will honor the Navajo Nation Business of the Year. The summit will conclude with a full day of resourceful presentations during the 6th Annual Business Opportunity Day on April 14.

VICE PRESIDENT NEZ ATTENDS ZIKA ACTION PLAN SUMMIT AT CDC HEADQUARTERS IN ATLANTA

ATLANTA—Tribal, state and federal officials gathered at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention headquarters for the Zika Action Plan Summit April 1. The summit was targeted at providing insight on the challenges facing many U.S. states from the emerging health threat known as the Zika virus.

Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez was among the tribal leaders in attendance, along with Tohono O’odham Councilman Chester Antone. They co-chair the CDC and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry Tribal Advisory Committee.

Vice President Nez said, “The Navajo Nation Department of Health must be mobilized. (Zika virus) is one of the first major outreach effort for infectious disease the new department is facing. It’s not here yet, but we’re doing everything we can to keep it out.”

The Office of the President and Vice President is working with Craig Manning, team lead for health communications, Viral Special Pathogens Branch of the CDC, for public outreach efforts on the Navajo Nation for hanta virus, Zika virus, *O. lupi*, and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

The CDC, OPVP, and Navajo Epidemiology Center will broadcast a series of public service announcements on local radio stations on these various health threats. The messages will be in Navajo for the benefit of tribal elders in the rural areas.

Additionally, public

presentations will be made at chapter events, beginning with the Chinle Agency Council meeting on April 9 at Salina Springs-Cottonwood Chapter House.

ZAP Zika

The summit featured presentations from Dr. Tom Frieden, CDC Director; Dr. Denise Jamieson, CDC Medical Officer for the Division of Reproductive Health; Dr. Beth Bell, CDC National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases Director; and Dr. Lyle Petersen, CDC Division of Vector-Borne Diseases Director and Incident Manager for Zika Response.

The Zika virus is a public health emergency that poses significant risks to pregnant women and is the latest in a series of unpredicted health threats. The most serious risk is to developing fetus.

“For the first time in 50 years, a virus has been linked to microcephaly, other serious birth defects, and poor pregnancy outcomes,” said Frieden. “It is also associated with Guillain-Barré syndrome.”

He said the Obama administration has requested \$1.9 billion from Congress in emergency funding to prepare for, respond to, and protect people from Zika. Forty percent of that amount would be for states and tribal nations to respond to the threat.

The funds will be used to rapidly expand mosquito control programs, acceleration of vaccine research and diagnostic development; education of health



Dr. Tom Frieden, CDC Director and Vice President Jonathan Nez.

providers, women and partners about the disease; improvement of health services and support for low-income pregnant women; and helping Zika-affected countries better control transmission.

The CDC has been traveling and testing guidance for the virus, especially for pregnant women, children and couples interested in conceiving. There has been a link for sexual transmission and the center is working on clinical guidelines to prevent spread of the disease.

Frieden said sustainable mosquito control is key, including human-based surveillance for Zika and of birth defects for clinical response.

“Our key priority is to decrease risk to pregnant women and women of reproductive age,” he said.

Zika and Pregnant Women

Jamieson said in the U.S., there have been 312 travel-associated cases

of the Zika virus. There have been zero locally transmitted cases of the virus, however. Twenty-seven were pregnant women, 6 were sexually transmitted, and there was 1 case of Guillain-Barré syndrome.

For U.S. territories, there were 3 travel-associated cases, 349 locally transmitted cases, 37 pregnant women affected, 1 case of Guillain-Barré syndrome, and zero sexually transmitted cases.

“Pregnant women can be infected through a mosquito bite and sex with an infected male partner. If infected around conception, Zika might present risk to the fetus. If infected during pregnancy, Zika can be passed to the fetus during pregnancy or around the time of birth,” she said.

Pregnant women are encouraged to prevent mosquito bites through use of insect repellent, covering their skin and mosquito-proofing their homes. Additionally, safe sex or abstinence is encouraged, especially

if their partner recently returned home from the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, and South America.

The CDC has established the U.S. Zika Pregnancy Registry, Zika Active Pregnancy Surveillance System in Puerto Rico, in addition to collaborating with Brazil and Columbia, and is studying of how long the virus stays in semen, urine and breast milk.

CDC Support

Bell said the CDC is building state capacity to identify babies with birth defects and working with partners to ensure that families are connected with services.

“Ensure that healthcare providers are aware of resources and updated clinical guidance. Facilitate coordination among your state programs. Practice effective risk communication principles. Ensure access to contraception to prevent unintended pregnancy. Deliver resources to ensure capacity for children or special health care needs,” she said.

Identifying people with the Zika virus infection is challenging because most people with the virus do not have symptoms, usually only mild clinical illnesses that do not require medical care. Symptoms are not specific include rash, fever, joint pain, headache and reddish eyes.

Lab testing for Zika is also challenging, Bell said, adding that clinicians should be educated on collection, storage, and transport of

the correct specimens for testing.

Labs should also be supported to enhance surge capacity, with priority testing for pregnant women.

Know Your Mosquitoes

Petersen said, *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* are mosquitoes that mostly bite during the day, but can also bite at night.

Aedes aegypti prefers to feed on people while *Aedes albopictus* will feed on people and animals. They prefer to lay eggs in man-made containers that may dry out completely.

“For *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* control, focus is at the individual property level,” Petersen said.

This includes targeted outdoor residual spraying, indoor residual spraying when appropriate and larvicide in containers, tires, tree holes and sanitation.

Culex pipiens and *Culex quique fascintus* are night biters that prefer birds. They lay eggs in standing water with a lot of organic material, such as lakes, ditches, gutters and neglected pools.

“*Culex* mosquito control is focused on the community level,” he said.

This includes widespread space spraying, larvicide in storm drains, septic ditches, tanks, fish or larvicide in abandoned pools, and larvicide in containers around homes.

The *Aedes* mosquitoes are linked to Zika while *Culex* mosquitoes are linked to West Nile virus.

OPVP will provide more updates as information is available.