



*The Executive Report*

**NORTHERN NAVAJO AGENCY COUNCIL MEETING**

Cove, Navajo Nation (Arizona)

MARCH 19, 2011

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**M**r. Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Council Delegates, Chapter Officials, relatives and visitors. Thank you for allowing me time to speak to the Northern Navajo Agency Council. I am honored to be with you this morning to share information on activities the Office of the President and Vice President is currently involved with that impact the Northern Agency.

**TWIN ARROWS CASINO**

As outlined in the State of the Nation on January 24, our administration will focus creating jobs for our Navajo workforce. Recently we broke ground for the Northern Edge Navajo Casino and on Monday, March 21, we will be breaking ground again for the Twin Arrows Navajo Casino near Leupp Chapter. This casino is a part of our plan to further economic prosperity for our Nation and through the development of our infrastructure, many workers from our communities will benefit from this project. The local economy will flourish and many of our employees at the Twin Arrows Casino will be Navajo. The Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, Mr. Larry Echohawk, Council Delegate Walter Phelps, and chapter officials will be joining us at the ceremony.



## **SAN JUAN COUNTY ROAD 7950 IMPROVEMENT**

San Juan County received SAFETEA-LU from the FHWA \$800,000 to improve SJC Route 7950 for the people living in the Chaco Canyon area. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was completed jointly with San Juan County, NM, and the Navajo Nation and it was submitted to the Federal Highway Administration- Albuquerque office for approval. Last year, the National Park Service (NPS) opposed efforts to improve this road because they felt that our efforts would disturb the historic park and increase the number of visitors. To remedy the matter, we went into mediation meetings to resolve their concerns, and have come to an agreement to distribute the responsibilities to each agency to improve the route. Thus, an MOU/MOA will be developed amongst the agencies, and we will send a letter to FHWA to discuss this agreement and request for an issuance of the Findings of No Significant Impacts (FONSI), so the project can commence this year.

## **STATE OF NEW MEXICO**

Government-to-government collaboration and partnerships with New Mexico continue to be important to the Navajo Nation. As Vice President, I established strong relations with state leaders and will continue this effort as president. Last year, the national recession and hard economic times forced us to communicate more effectively on issues affecting the Navajo people living in New Mexico. Cuts to vital services, creating additional revenues, and protecting capital outlay funding were among the many issues discussed between the state and the Navajo Nation. With a new administration, the Vice President and I will work closely with Governor Susana Martinez to ensure vital services are provided to our people. Further, we will partner with the state to identify



solutions to streamline and make the capital outlay process more efficient on both the state and tribal side.

As you know, the legislature was in session and our delegation worked hard to promote the interests of our people. Senators John Pinto, Lynda Lovejoy, and George Munoz are owed our gratitude. We are also grateful to Representative Sandra Jeff, Ray Begaye, Ken Martinez, Patricia "Patty" Lundstrom, and Eliseo Lee Alcon.

Along with the Speaker's Office and Legislative Branch, my office has been active at the legislative session. Everyday we review and monitor bills as they move through the legislative process. To protect our interests, we advocated and opposed several bills, including SJM 6 and SB 475, which could eliminate the Public Regulation Commission, and both SB 421 and HB 81, which could adversely affect the sacred sites within our homeland.

The protection of sacred sites continues to be important to my administration and we will continue to advocate for the protection of Mount Taylor. During the legislative session, my team, alongside the Speaker's Office and Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, has worked tirelessly to monitor bills that affect sacred sites.

Specifically, we focused on HB 81, a bill which would prohibit common lands of a land grant-merced that is a political subdivision of the state from being considered to be, designated or treated as state land and preserving the property rights of certain Spanish Land Grant heirs. If passed, this bill would allow land grants the same status as tribes and would also allow land grants the ability to



bypass cultural properties laws and regulations. When it was considered in the House of Representatives, Representative Jeff was the only person in the body who voted against the bill and the Navajo Nation thanks her for taking a stand to protect Mount Taylor. Unfortunately, HB 81 has a lot of momentum and will most likely be signed into law.

Lastly, my staff and the Department of Justice worked closely with Senator Munoz to find a compromise on SB 224, which would clarify that local county governments may act as fiscal agents for chapters of the Navajo Nation. Unfortunately, there was not enough time in the session to consider every bill, including SB 224. As we move forward, my administration will work with both state and tribal leaders to ensure that we create a more efficient process for capital outlay projects.

## **FEDERAL BUDGET**

As you may have read in the news, the federal government is operating under a continuing resolution, which was recently extended another three weeks. Within this time period, Congress and the administration will negotiate a budget for FY 2011, which is contained in H.R. 1.

At this point, the house passed H.R. 1, and now moves to the Senate for consideration. Once they pass their version, it must go back to the House of Representatives, and both bodies must reach a compromise. All this will happen within the next few weeks. From the Navajo Nation, we are completing our own analysis of HR 1. Our position is to “hold harmless” funding to Indian Country and made this position clear in a letter to President Obama.



Regarding H.R. 1, we are facing a few challenges. At the moment, our primary concern relates to the Navajo Technical College in Crownpoint. In both the CR and H.R. 1, 50% of fund for NTC is de-authorized. Our hope is to remove language in H.R. 1 that de-authorizes NTC. Politically, some in Congress believe on the federal side that funding for NTC and the United Tribes Technical College are earmarks and currently, there is a trend to move away from earmarks.

Two weeks ago, my office sent a letter to the majority leadership within the U.S. Senate expressing our concerns. When I was in Washington, I met with Senator Jeff Bingaman to discuss this issue and addressed White House officials on this matter, including Charles Galbraith, the newly appointed Associate Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, who is also a member of the Navajo Nation. The White House is aware of the proposed cut for Navajo Technical College and has agreed to review the matter. Again, our position is to hold harmless cuts to Indian Country.

Lastly, other areas of concern within H.R. 1 relate to funding for Navajo Agriculture Products Industry, as well as stipulations in H.R. 1 concerning ARRA. In its existing form, H.R. 1 contains language that states any funds that have not been expended by February 11, 2011, will be returned to the federal government. To address this concern, we pulled together our division directors and made them aware of the language. Currently, OPVP is receiving an update on the status of these funds. The positive news is that many of our programs have expended or have committed the dollars. But, we will continue to push our programs to spend their dollars.

## **ADMINISTRATION & THE NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL**



Since the reduction of council delegates, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Navajo Nation Council within the Legislative Branch is reorganizing. So with those efforts of restructuring, I created the Executive Branch Reorganization Taskforce to address cost containment and ensure efficiency within the government. Appointments to this taskforce have begun and we have to look at ways to cut costs and practice financial responsibility.

For short-term goals, the Shelly-Jim Administration established the (SAS) Executive Review Working Group in order to evaluate our internal structure and look at how we can improve the review process. I have heard the complaints and many struggles with the SAS process. We will reform this system and make it work for our divisions and programs in order to provide better service to the Navajo people.

Another opportunity for immediate reform is the Procurement Process. The Division of Community Development along with our chapters, the Department of Justice, the Judicial Branch, and the Controller's Office have met and discussed the proposed amendments to the Navajo Nation Procurement Act. The Department of Justice is finalizing these revisions and it will be before the Navajo Nation Council soon for consideration. I continue to work diligently with Speaker Johnny Naize to ensure that the tribal council considers the new amendments when it comes before them.

Some long-term goals are infrastructure. With our natural resources we have the capacity for renewable energy, both wind and solar, to develop a comprehensive energy policy. I have appointed Mr. Samuel Woods, my policy advisor, to take the lead in recreating the Energy Development Committee, which will update



and coordinate the development of our energy portfolio. Appointments from the Division of Community Development, Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Justice, and Minerals Department have been made.

A majority of the appointments to my cabinet and within the executive office have been made and is ongoing. Each appointee is under a 90-day review as I evaluate their performance. It is my intention to appoint the best-qualified people with the heart and dedication to assist me in moving our Nation forward.

My office continues to be active in many areas and is open and available to assist in efforts to better the livelihood of the Navajo people. *Ahehee'*.