



State of the Navajo Nation

FALL SESSION - OCTOBER 15, 2018

STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION ADDRESS

Fall Session, October 15, 2018

Ya'ateeh Shí K'é do Shí Diné

Ahéhee' Speaker LoRenzo Bates, honorable delegates of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council, distinguished guests in the audience and members of the great Navajo Nation for receiving my State of the Navajo Nation Address.

Flags on the Navajo Nation are currently flying at half-staff in remembrance of the Honorable Delegate Steven Begay. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with Delegate Begay's family, friends and colleagues on the Council during this difficult time.

I also want to thank the Arizona Department of Transportation and the Navajo Division of Transportation for their work on Highway 89. A rainstorm on October 3 caused a sinkhole to form north of Cameron. Navajo and Arizona workers repaired the road within days. Thousands of our Navajo people travel on that road. We appreciate the swift response.

Ghááji marks the beginning of the Diné New Year. It's a period of transition during which we harvest crops to prepare for the winter. The preparation for cold and hardship has traditionally brought Diné families and communities together.

Autumn is a time for reflection and planning for the future. In my address today, I want to highlight some of the milestones reached during the last three and a half years. As an administration, we realized many positive "firsts" for the Navajo Nation and for Indian Country. But we also struggled with many negative "firsts" that will continue to impact our people in the years to come.

Despite any obstacles, the Office of the President and all the Executive Offices have continued to build a stronger Navajo Nation for our children and grandchildren.

On September 21, I signed the fiscal year 2019 budget, appropriating more than \$172 million for government operations in the next 12 months. We will continue negotiating unallocated amounts, including the UUFB and carryover funds. This budget is higher than the 2018 budget, but there will be real challenges with revenues in the coming years.

Realistically, and despite our efforts to find a new owner,

the decommissioning of Navajo Generating Station will continue. My administration negotiated a two-year extension for NGS, but the station mostly likely will close at the end of 2019.

Given the timeframe, negotiating the extension lease was a major accomplishment. It preserved thousands of direct and indirect jobs for the Navajo Nation and continued the flow of revenue from NGS while the Nation sought a new owner. I continue to support efforts to keep NGS in operation.

In less than a month, Arizona voters will decide whether to endorse Proposition 127, which requires electric companies selling power in the state to get half of their electricity from renewable sources by 2030. We are not opposed to the goals of Prop 127, but it will seriously harm the Navajo economy. There are better ways to achieve these objectives without impacting our revenue source. We already produce renewable energy with the Kayenta Solar Facility, and we are working to double that.

The uncertainty of NGS prompted my administration to tighten the budget while seeking ways to diversify our economy. Leaning less on coal and natural resources, I've pushed for the Naat'aanii Development Corporation to identify companies interested in setting up operations on the Navajo Nation.

The Naat'aanii Development Corporation is fully operational with current funding and an acting director.

Through the Naat'aanii Development Corporation, the Navajo Nation will eliminate dual taxation for any of the company's subsidiaries. The NDC has captured the attention of major companies, including Boeing, Airbus, Waste Management and Altree.

The Navajo Nation is paving the way to improve health care services by creating a managed care organization to take over Medicaid for our people. By doing so, we can redirect insurance monies that go off the Nation back into local facilities to strengthen the tribal health care system.

These ventures have the potential to bring billions of dollars into the Navajo Nation economy.

Our administration worked with veterans from every

agency to craft and implement the Navajo Veterans Act. The passing of the Navajo Veterans Act was monumental and established the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration and Advisory Council.

In order to have the legislation passed, the Office of the President had to work directly with commanders at the agency level. By doing this, we accomplished what no other administration has. We passed the Navajo Veterans Act.

The Navajo Veterans Act has enhanced the ability for veterans to file benefit claims through their local Veterans Service Offices. Through the Act, the Navajo Nation established an MOU with the Arizona Department of Veterans Services that affords Navajo Veterans officers access to ADVS's administrative infrastructure to file claims on behalf of Navajo veterans. Our office is currently establishing the same MOU with the state of New Mexico.

We listened to the concerns of our female warriors who faced disparity in being recognized for their service in the armed forces. Our office collaborated with the Navajo Veterans Administration to commemorate the first Navajo Nation Women Veterans Day, which was held on March 20. I signed a proclamation dedicating March 20 annually as a day to honor our women warriors for their service.

Our administration continues to work with the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration to provide homes for our veterans in need. OPVP and the NNVA are currently working with the Southwest Indian Foundation to construct 10 homes. We will continue to find solutions to provide homes for our Navajo veterans.

This year we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of 1868 with the United States of America. This compromise allowed our people to return to our homeland within the four sacred mountains. It recognized our people as a Nation in the eyes of the federal government.

As president of the Navajo Nation, I consistently meet with federal policymakers to ensure that they recognize the unique, sovereign status of tribes, and the nation-to-nation relationship tribes have with the United States.

Recently, the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services issued a policy that seeks to undermine this relationship. Rather than recognize Navajo as a sovereign nation, the policy tries to redefine us as a racial group. This is an assault on our sovereignty that we must continue to fight.

On September 26, Congress passed a spending bill to

continue funding federal agencies including Health and Human Services. Included with that bill is a report that reaffirms Indian tribes as sovereign nations with guaranteed access to health care. We are sovereign, political entities, not racial groups. We will continue to challenge this policy until it is reversed.

Another ongoing battle is our lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Three years after the Gold King Mine spill, we are still waiting for the EPA to compensate farmers and ranchers along the San Juan River. Just last month we received checks totaling \$135,000 for the Navajo Construction and Engineering Authority and some of the chapters, including Mexican Water, Upper Fruitland and Oljato, but even this funding falls short by millions of dollars. We will continue to hold the federal government accountable for the spill. We will continue to demand that farmers and ranchers are fairly compensated.

Congratulations to those candidates in the general election. The Navajo people are looking to you for leadership.

The right to vote in American elections was not afforded to us by the treaty. It is a right that we continue to fight for.

In Utah's San Juan County, we fought and won to create fair voting districts for the county's commission and school board. Estimates show that Navajos hold a majority of the votes, yet never held a majority of the representation in that county. With the new election districts, this all could change. Shí Diné, I urge you to make this fight meaningful and exercise your right to vote in November at the local, county, state and national level. When we show up at the polls we are a powerful swing vote.

I began my tenure as president of the Navajo Nation with a plea to the young professionals who left their homes on the reservation to pursue education and careers elsewhere. I asked them to come home. I asked them to dedicate four years to my administration to show the Navajo Nation what can be accomplished when we employ quality and competent Navajo workers. This remains one of the hallmarks of my presidency. Because I built my cabinet with highly educated, motivated and capable professionals, we accomplished much.

In New Mexico, our administration stopped funding reversions that hindered development in Navajo chapters. We addressed the basic infrastructure needs of our Navajo people and elders by focusing on electric lines, water lines and the construction of senior centers. Our focus remains on improving the lives of the Navajo people.

We are proud to report that the Navajo Nation completed 128 projects for our 54 chapters in New Mexico. These projects amounted to approximately \$20 million.

My administration continues to work with the New Mexico chapters to prepare for the 2019 New Mexico Legislative Session. Preliminary economic reports predict that the state will receive more than \$500 million in new money.

This provides a great opportunity for many of our chapters and programs. Our relationship with the State of New Mexico is stronger than ever and we are in a position to take on many more new projects. This relationship is vital and must remain a focal point of the future.

The youth represent more than half of the population of the Navajo Nation, yet their voices often go unheard. During my administration, we developed and implemented the first Navajo Nation Youth Advisory Council. We empowered the youth by giving them the platform to engage with leaders.

The responsibility of the youth council is to provide policy recommendations, identify issues and recommend action. The advisory council includes representatives from each of the five agencies and the Navajo Nation at-large.

Keeping our students on the path of education is important.

In the past three years, I've made 17 agreements with universities and educational institutions to provide scholarships for Navajo students in fields of study like agriculture, social services, additive manufacturing, medicine and special education.

We need to grow and educate Navajo doctors who know our people and believe in improving their health. We know these doctors will be students from our communities, so it's important that we continue to open doors for them.

At the University of New Mexico, I addressed the financial burden of continued education by purchasing two floors of the Lobo Rainforest dormitory to offer reduced rent to our Navajo students. At Navajo Technical University, the Nation is building on-campus student housing to provide accommodation and eliminate long commutes for an additional 270 students.

We need to continue to provide similar opportunities for our students to invest in their education and their future. The nation established by the Treaty of 1868 did not include our original homeland in Colorado. In thinking about the future of our people, it was important to me that we expand the boundaries into Colorado and reclaim our land. My administration moved aggressively to purchase both the Wolf Springs and Boyer ranches near our sacred mountain of Tsisnaasjini, also known as Blanca Peak. In total, we gained more than 28,800 acres of prime farm and ranch land.

The purchases of both the Wolf Springs and Boyer ranches resulted from a collaborative effort between the legislative and executive branches. We honor the dedicated service of Honorable Delegate Steven Begay for co-sponsoring the legislation. Delegate Begay performed a ceremonial blessing on the Wolf Springs Ranch, securing that traditional protocols were adhered to in acquiring the property.

Growing the Navajo Nation in this way, for the betterment of our people, can only happen when we work together. Collaboration is truly how we'll move the Nation forward. Progress can only take place when we work together.

As we move into the future, our collective goals must remain intact. We must continue to build our local economies by expanding infrastructure that supports development. We must continue investing in the education of our people to provide a solid foundation for our nation's prosperity. Most importantly, together we must realize our potential to contribute to the greatness of the Navajo Nation. Our path to prosperity takes the cumulative effort of each and every one of us.

God bless you and God bless the Navajo Nation.




Russell Begaye, *President*
THE NAVAJO NATION