

THE STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION

President Russell Begaye

and

Vice President Jonathan Nez



The Executive Branch Report

Presented to the
23rd Navajo Nation Council
July 20, 2015



**NAVAJO NATION PRESIDENT RUSSELL BEGAYE
VICE PRESIDENT JONATHAN NEZ
STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION
2015 NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL SUMMER SESSION
JULY 20, 2015**

Mr. Speaker, members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council, distinguished guests, visitors in the gallery, and my fellow Navajo people:

Welcome to the 2015 Summer Session. We are honored and privileged to join you today inside this historic council chamber. Thank you for the opportunity. The summer rains have blessed our tribal lands and it is great to see the green vegetation across our nation. It's a sign that our great Navajo Nation is blooming and our lands are thriving.

Vice President Jonathan Nez and I are two months into our administration and already, we are making significant strides tribally, regionally and nationally. There is definitely more to come and we have selected key individuals that will build upon the four pillars of our administration and make our vision a reality.

We selected Ethel Branch to serve as Navajo Nation Attorney General. She is a graduate of Harvard Law School with both transactional and litigation experience. Ethel also obtained her master's degree in public policy and bachelor's degree from Harvard University.

Born in Tuba City, Ethel grew up in Leupp, herding sheep and tending to cattle on her family's ranch. She is licensed to practice law on the Navajo Nation and in the states of Arizona, Oregon and Washington. Ethel is a critical part of our administration.

We also selected Wenona Benally to serve as the executive director for the Office of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission. She most recently served as the assistant attorney general for the Pascua Yaqui Tribe near Tucson, Arizona and previously worked for the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona.

Wenona is from Kayenta. She earned her Juris Doctorate and master's degree in public policy at Harvard University. She obtained her master of law from the University of Arizona and earned her bachelor's of arts degree in English, summa cum laude, from Arizona State University.

For executive director of the Division of Natural Resources, we selected Bidtah Becker. She previously served as the assistant attorney general for the Navajo Department of Justice, under the Natural Resources Unit.

Bidtah earned her Juris Doctorate at the University of New Mexico School of Law. She is also a graduate of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. In 2012, President Barack Obama appointed her as a trustee for the Institute of American Indian Arts. She was also appointed to the boards of Navajo Studies, Inc. and the Southwestern Association of Indian Arts.

For the Division of Social Services, we tapped Terrelene Massey to serve as executive director. Terrelene is from Pinon, Arizona and holds a Juris Doctorate and Certificate in Indian Law from the University of New Mexico School of Law. She earned her master's degree in public affairs from the University of Texas at Austin and her bachelor's of science in political science from Arizona State University.

She previously worked for New Mexico Legal Aid, Incorporated, New Mexico Human Services Department, New Mexico Indian Affairs Department and the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development.



We selected Jackson Brossy to serve as executive director of the Navajo Nation Washington Office. Jackson is a graduate of Stanford University, where he received his bachelor's degree in economics, statistics and public policy. He is pursuing a master's degree in public policy from the Harvard John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Jackson knows his way around Capitol Hill politics and has plenty of diplomatic connections from his previous work as a Native American policy advocate and senior associate with Upper Mowhawk, Inc. He also worked for the National Congress of American Indians in Washington, D.C.

For the Division of Public Safety, we selected Jesse Delmar to serve as executive director. Jesse is a graduate of Northern Arizona University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice administration with a minor in psychology. He is also a graduate of the Federal Law Enforcement Academy and FBI National Academy.

Jesse most recently served multiple terms as chief of police for the Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation. He served as an executive fellow with the FBI Executive Fellowship Program in Washington, D.C., as vice president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police Indian Section and as president of the Indian Country Intelligence of Arizona.

For executive director of Navajo EPA, we selected Dr. Donald Benn. Dr. Benn earned his doctoral degree in chemistry at New Mexico State University in 2005. In 2000, he obtained his master's degree in chemistry from NMSU. In 1997, he earned his bachelor's degree in chemistry from University of New Mexico.

Dr. Benn is a scientist and most recently worked as research science consultant for Nihidah Nidii Dal, LLC in Lukachukai, from July 2010 to May 2015. In 2010, he successfully wrote and received the NASA-MIRS research grant for use at Navajo Technical University. He also worked as director of the Native American Research Laboratory at the University of Montana in Missoula.

For the executive director of the Navajo Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, we selected M. Teresa Hopkins. She worked for more than eight years with the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch, but has a strong background in telecommunications and is also chief executive officer of her own business, Diné Digital Services, LLC.

Teresa is experienced and very knowledgeable in such areas as telecommunications licensing, federal funding support, computer networking, microcomputer systems, local area networks, and more. We are very confident she will bring these skills to the table for the Navajo Nation.

For the executive director of Navajo Division of Transportation, we selected Garret Silversmith. Garret most recently worked for the BIA Department of Transportation in Chinle and is very familiar with the Federal Highway Administration funding and the processes for road construction and maintenance.

An engineer by trade, he obtained his bachelor's of science degree in civil engineering from New Mexico State University in 1993. Since then, he has worked as a project engineer with Navajo Housing Authority, staff engineer with Nations Gas Technologies, Incorporated, and as a civil engineer with Bighorse Engineers.

Our administration is very proud and excited to bring these highly educated and experienced professionals back to the Navajo Nation and you should be, too. They will assist us with restoring the confidence of the Navajo people back with the Office of the President and Vice President. The restoration of this trust also includes Capitol Hill, the Obama administration, tribal leaders, Standards and Poor and many others.

In addition to bringing home highly educated and experienced Navajo professionals, we also resolved to work together with our Legislative and Judicial Branches of government. Since our oath of office and inauguration two months ago, we have already met twice with our fellow Navajo leaders and agreed to nine priorities from the Nation.



The nine priority areas are water rights, economic development, infrastructure, housing, education, human services, governance, public safety, and natural resources. We will implement these priorities into the four pillars of our administration: Navajo Veterans, Elders and Youth, Infrastructure and Job Creation.

We met with Speaker LoRenzo Bates and acting Chief Justice Eleanor Shirley and said, moving forward, there should be one voice from the Navajo Nation on Capitol Hill and around the globe. The Nation has not had a consistent message from the tribal branches on specific priorities. That played to the advantage of other tribes across Indian Country lobbying against us.

It's very important that we do not lose sight of these priorities and the fact that the only way to achieve our goals is by working together, not against each other. We appointed highly competent individuals that have the dedication and experience to achieve our Nation's objectives. Navajo Nation leadership will meet quarterly to ensure the lines of communication remain open between the branches and to provide updates on our progress.

Our tribal government has an opportunity right now to re-evaluate the way our divisions, departments and programs do business. We must embrace the opportunity and ensure our tribal operations maximize efficiency at all levels. We must downsize the central government and give it back to the Navajo people.

The Office of the President and Vice President will soon share our recommendations on how to utilize the Sihasin Fund to the benefit of the Navajo Nation. We must exercise fiduciary responsibility and consider how we could utilize the funds to elevate the Nation to the coveted AAA rating.

By doing so, we would return a lot of confidence back into the Nation by the financial institutions, banks, S&P and others because they would know that we are set to pay our debts. In turn, that would open the door for future bond opportunities to build our infrastructure needs.

We are creating a position within our office to specifically track all external funds coming into the Nation. This individual would track the timeline of when we received the funds, what reports are needed, deadline dates, project management needs and work closely with the grantees. We must ensure that the Office of Management and Budget is communicating with the Office of the Controller.

We said the same thing about creating a position at OPVP for a veterans' liaison that would work with the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on behalf of our Navajo veterans. We appointed Jamescita Peshlakai for that role in June and she is already working on behalf of our veterans.

This is just a broad overview of our plans for the future. In order for these goals and objectives to be achieved, we must be committed to working together. The Navajo people elected us to work on their behalf and that is where we must remain steadfast in our actions, especially when funding is involved.

We cannot exceed the Undesignated, Unreserved Fund Balance. We must be very strategic on how we spend the Navajo people's money. In the past, utilizing riders for supplemental appropriation requests was a popular methodology that caused overspending. We do not want to go down that road again.

Please be diligent and work with our office to ensure our Nation does not fall into deficit. All supplemental appropriation requests should be in the form of stand-alone legislation and go through the required five-day comment period to ensure the Navajo people have their input on the funding request.

During our Navajo Nation Leadership meetings, we all agreed to work together and keep open channels of communication between the branches. Let us remain committed to this. We recently were notified of legislation that was introduced to create a police commission. The fact that we were never invited to the table to sit down and



talk about this legislation affecting one of our divisions was disheartening. Instead, we heard about the initiative when the bill was introduced.

That is not an example of working together. Please, we encourage the members of this distinguished body and our counterparts at the Judicial Branch to remain committed to working together for the benefit of the Navajo people. If we are to have a united voice on Capitol Hill and upon the global stage, it must first begin here, at home.

Thank you for the opportunity to report to you on the Navajo Nation Executive Branch. The state of the Navajo Nation is strong and we working together to fortify that strength even further, onto the steps of Capitol Hill and the rest of Indian Country.

Ahe'hee and God bless.



**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT
THE NAVAJO NATION
P.O. BOX 7440
100 PARKWAY
WINDOW ROCK, AZ 86515
PHONE: 928-871-7000
FAX: 928-871-4025
WWW.NAVAJOPRESIDENT.ORG**