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THE STATE OF THE NATION

President Ben Shelly and Vice President Rex Lee Jim

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*M*r. Speaker, members of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council, Mr. Vice President, First Lady, relatives, chapter officials, staff, family and friends, I want to say thank you to everyone here today for the opportunity to present the state of the Navajo Nation address. I also would like to recognize visiting federal, state, county and tribal leaders here with us today. Most importantly, I want to thank our Code Talkers, our veterans, those still serving in the armed forces and our own police officers for their willingness to serve and protect. And I want to take time to honor the memory of the Honorable Frank Chee Willetto.

I want to thank the delegates for making the annual journey by horse and bike to this year's summer session. This journey honors our traditions and who we are as Dine. We are grateful for the rains that have blessed our homelands and once again providing much needed moisture.

In the past few months, we have seen the vast and varied strength of our people. Our strength showed in numbers and in silence, but now we must begin to look ahead and come together again as the Navajo Nation. We must move forward to make the state of the Navajo Nation stronger.

Our People deserve an open and transparent government and the Shelly/Jim administration has always strived for transparency and accountability within our Navajo government. We have shown transparency by taking issues directly to the People and we will continue to do so.

Nearly two weeks ago, the Navajo Nation Council voted against legislation that would have approved the Navajo-Hopi Little Colorado River Water Rights Settlement.

But our Council also passed legislation that disapproves the LCR settlement. I will veto this legislation, unless, we can work with the Council and provide some amendments for a settlement that we can all agree upon.

Our people need to realize that in rejecting the settlement we are saying no to our future. We are denying our children and grandchildren safe drinking water. We are denying our people a better way of life.

Therefore, it is vital that we come together and seek a solution. We must put aside our differences. We must acknowledge the benefits of the settlement that are good for the Navajo Nation as a whole. Without the LCR settlement there will be no protections for the flows of the Little Colorado River that reach the Navajo Nation today. Instead off-



reservation development will continue and Navajo opportunities to use the main stem of the Little Colorado River will continue to disappear

Without an LCR settlement there will be no protections for Navajo uses of the C and N Aquifers. Off-Reservation users will continue to advance and develop, which could potentially harm Navajo water.

Without the LCR Settlement there will be no agreement between the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe on the management and protection of the N-Aquifer and washes, and no funding for N-Aquifer protection. Right now we are in court with the Hopi Tribe where Hopi asserts that their needs should be met before Navajo's because they claim they were here first.

Without an LCR settlement there will be no funding for drinking water development projects. The settlement provides \$340 million for building the projects.

There will be no funding to complete the feasibility study for the Western Navajo Pipeline.

Without an LCR settlement there will be no water delivered to the communities of St. Michaels, Fort Defiance and Window Rock through the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project. This water cannot be delivered without an LCR settlement.

I appreciate all the efforts by some of the Council Delegates to study and understand the settlement. I also appreciate the efforts of the people to understand the settlement and express their concerns. We heard many comments on how to improve the settlement.

With various amendments that would address some of the concerns of the People, I believe that there is still an opportunity to revisit the settlement. I urge the Navajo Nation Council to reconsider the Little Colorado River settlement. As a leader, I have heard many sides to this issue. I weigh my decisions on what is best for the People and the future of our children. This is why I support the LCR settlement.

We haven't received that much moisture in the past seasons. This fact weighs heavy on my mind and heart. I know that many of the chapters have emergency funding.

In recent agency council meetings, I asked chapters that are experiencing hardships because of lack of rain, to pass a resolution declaring a drought emergency. The more resolutions we get, the easier it is for me to declare a state of emergency because of ongoing drought conditions.

The National Weather Service said the monsoon season will bring more than usual rain this year, but that will not be enough to bring us out of the drought.

Our crops, people and livestock are thirsty, and as leaders, we must do what we can to help.

In May, I signed an executive order placing a fire restriction on the Navajo Nation because the conditions throughout our reservation have been dry. This summer, our firefighters have fought many wild fires in Teec Nos Pos, Toadlena, Crystal, Wheatfields, Sawmill, Wide Ruins and communities in between.

Our emergency management teams have responded quickly to wildfires throughout the Navajo Nation and we need to provide them with the resources necessary to ensure that our homes, livestock and lands are safe.

The order I signed states that People must obtain a permit from the Forestry Office to have an open fire, and those are the only fires that are allowed. Please, relatives, adhere



to the fire restriction and if it's a ceremonial burn, then please attain a fire burning permit. We were given our homeland by the Holy People, so we must do everything we can to protect and care for it.

Another way we are looking to protect our homeland is the introduction of the Navajo Grazing Act. Past administrations have tried to make this law, but it sits in draft form as we experience severe drought conditions.

We must begin to examine our laws that are in place that manage how we utilize and restore the land.

Our specialists have said sand dunes are growing and the land is being over grazed. For example, we have nearly 170,000 sheep in Fort Defiance Agency, while our land can only support about 7,800 sheep.

Dry conditions have led to livestock migrating to different water sources, which is causing conflict among our Navajo ranchers and livestock owners. And the time has come to take responsibility as stewards of the land.

The Navajo Grazing Act would create new ways to manage our land in times of increased livestock population. The act would help our people understand the traditional and contemporary role our livestock plays in our lives. The Navajo Grazing Act is one way we can come together for the future, and show our grandchildren we can work together.

As we think about our land, we have much of it, but we must also remember that we have more than 500 abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation. This administration is seeking ways to clean up the abandoned mines and to make the Navajo communities safe for our people.

In response to the threats of new uranium ISL mining proposed in Church Rock, Crownpoint and around Mt. Taylor, a sacred mountain to our People, the Navajo Nation Council adopted the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act on April 19, 2005, prohibiting uranium mining and processing in Navajo Country. Under this administration, we will continue to adhere to this law and not allow any uranium mining.

In May, I signed an executive order that established the Navajo Nation Uranium Task Force. The task force will consist of members from both the executive branch and legislative branch.

Together, we will examine the complex issues of uranium and its impacts on the Navajo Nation. Then we will begin to explore ways to increase our capacity to reclaim the land and communities that have been affected by uranium.

While the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency partners with the U.S. EPA for clean up projects, our Navajo government must develop solutions based on a broad, focused and coordinated effort for the next 100 years.

This task force will look at creating an advisory board or commission to ensure that clean ups continue and meet the needs of the people. We must create policies that are aggressive because we must protect our people from uranium mining and its effects.

Also to help in our efforts to increase funding for our people affected by uranium mining, a major health study will soon start. With coordination from the University of New Mexico, the Center for Disease Control, Indian Health Service, Navajo Division of Health and the NNEPA, we are going to launch a new study that will examine the affects abandoned mines have had on our mothers and children.



When completed, the study will help us address the issues related to uranium on the Navajo Nation. More importantly, the study will help Congress and federal agencies aggressively address all issues related to uranium and its impact on health, safety and protection of the Navajo People.

Another study that is being launched is the Navajo Medicaid Feasibility Study. This study will look at the feasibility of the Navajo Nation administering its own Medicaid agency. The study will include vital information on the infrastructure and systems in place regarding the enrollment into the Navajo Nation, enrollment into Medicaid, and the billing process. We must find alternative means to maintain our services amid federal budget cuts.

When the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Affordable Care Act, it was a victory for the Navajo Nation and Indian Nations as a whole. With the court's decision came the permanent status of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act.

We have also experienced excellent outcomes for our Navajo children in New Mexico these past couple of months.

As the school year came to an end, one reservation school district was facing the possibility of a split school district, while another was facing school closures.

Central Consolidated School District was facing opposition from community members of Kirtland, who wanted to create a new school district. They set out to create a new school district that would've ended their boundaries at the reservation line, even though Kirtland schools had about 70 percent Navajo students.

Vice President Jim testified at a hearing held by Secretary Hanna Skandera in Farmington about the proposed split. We sent letters supporting our children stating that the district must not be split.

Last month, after a meeting with our staff and Speaker Johnny Naize, Secretary Skandera said the district will remain together.

Meanwhile, we faced another battle with the Gallup McKinley County School District. In May, the school board voted to close three middle schools. The communities of Navajo, Crownpoint and Tohatchi faced the possibility of closures of their middle schools.

Our office sent letters again, citing that the district did not consult with parents and the Navajo Nation. According to the New Mexico Indian Education Act, a district must consult with a tribal nation regarding reorganization of a school district. I would like to thank the parents and community members of these communities that voiced their concerns.

Last week, Secretary Skandera announced that the schools will remain open in all three communities. We thank Secretary Skandera and Governor Susana Martinez for keeping the best interests of our children in mind.

We came together when we needed to and showed a unified front, and this allowed us to convey our message. We must exercise this partnership, and we can do so much more for our people.

We might not agree on every issue, but that doesn't mean we can't work together. We are a powerful unit when we work together. But first we must come together.

I ask again, let us be powerful together as one Navajo Nation.



The state of our Navajo Nation is strong, and we are beginning to realize even more of our strength. Our future is bright and it is our duty to keep it so. One of the ways we can keep our Nation strong is by being financially responsible.

For Fiscal Year 2013, the Navajo Nation has begun its process to create a more accountable government. The Budget and Finance Committee and the Office of Management and Budget with direction from the Office of the President and Vice President, have required that all programs in the Navajo Nation have a Strategic Management Plan as a guide for meeting their requirements and providing better services to the Navajo people.

This will be the first year of true performance based budgeting. Next year, our government will see even more drastic changes in how we budget. If our programs that receive general funds are not meeting their measurable goals, they will be held accountable.

For the first time the Navajo Nation also has overall priorities established to meet the needs of the people. Last month, Chief Justice Herb Yazzie, Speaker Naize and I met to discuss our branch priorities. We were able to agree on priorities for the Navajo Nation. I shared these documents with our divisions under the executive branch so the programs will know what goals they need to work toward.

The Navajo Nation government needs to evolve with our changing times. Our youth and elders want our government to be transparent and accountable. During Town Halls early in my administration, there were several issues that different communities discussed. These issues centered on accountability, transparency, improved roads, better housing and access to running water. I remember what those community members shared with me over a year ago, and that is what I continue to work for today.

I promised change to the people. I will continue to honor that pledge of change. Ahe'hee'.