



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Nation welcomes Pony Express to Window Rock

*"There's a definite interest to raise funds for our children who have become fatherless and motherless from the war."
— Leila Help-Tulley, legislative staff assistant with the Office of the Speaker*

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The patriotic phrase "Let Freedom Ring" is often heard nationwide and Wednesday afternoon at the Navajo Nation Veteran's Park that freedom was heard when leaders, community members, and visiting tourists were given the opportunity to ring a replica of the 1753 Liberty Bell.

"It's a wonderful and special day for our people," said Charles Long, legislative staff assistant to the Office of the Speaker. "We are very fortunate to have the Liberty Bell here on the Navajo Nation. Freedom means a lot to our people, especially our veterans."

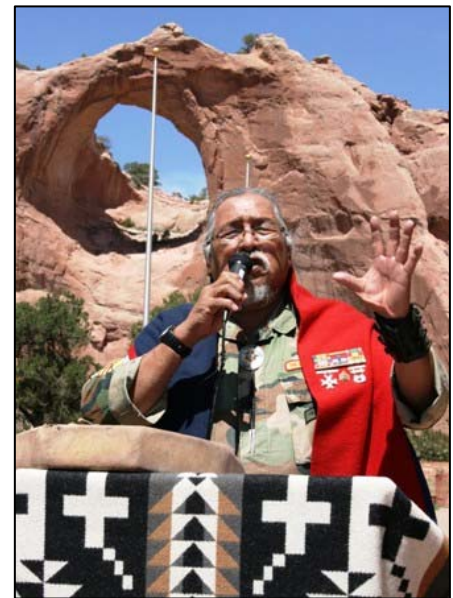
The Navajo Nation welcoming ceremony began with an honor ride escort of the Liberty Bell from the Arizona-New Mexico state line to the Navajo Nation Veterans' Park. The Twin Warrior Society opened the welcoming ceremony with the posting of colors and Robert Williams of the society gave the invocation.

A crowd of local residents and tourists attended the historic event, and circled around the bell to take pictures and listened attentively as leaders spoke. Long gave an overview of the respect the Navajo people have for freedom and the services rendered by Navajo veterans to both the Navajo Nation and the United States.

"We have warriors dating back before European contact," Long said. "Our Navajo warriors have always defended our way of life; our warriors were there fighting for our freedom."

With so many Navajo and Native American veterans, Long said the Navajo people deserve better services and treatment than what they are currently receiving from the federal government. David Hall, "belladier" with the Pony Express advocacy group who brought the bell to the Nation, agreed.

It was Hall's first visit to the Navajo Nation, but he said he was familiar with the high number of Native Americans who served in the military.



The Navajo Nation welcomed the Pony Express veterans advocacy group to the Navajo Nation on Wednesday, Aug. 20, 2008. Pictured is a replica of the Liberty Bell in front of Window Rock. Bottom photo, Council Delegate Larry Anderson delivers a speech. (Photo by Joshua Lavar Butler)

"We ignore Native Americans and the sacrifices they've given to America," Hall said. The Pony Express organization which Hall travels with is widely known for their replica of the original 1753 Liberty Bell, which they ring in honor of fallen soldiers when requested. The group often coordinates with other veterans' advocacy groups to bring attention to issues affecting veterans and active-duty military personnel. They travel in conjunction with the Run for the Wall, a national veteran's advocacy organization the Navajo Nation works closely with.

Hall said he observed several Navajo people bless themselves after ringing the bell, and added it was the first time he has seen that.

"It was symbolic," Hall said, adding he was honored to be on the Navajo Nation. "When the Navajos grabbed the bell of Liberty, it showed they wanted a society that is lawful and they recognized the freedom that comes from a lawful society."

The group was organized nearly three years ago to raise money for college-aged children of soldiers who have been killed in action. A trust fund formed by the organization has already raised nearly \$1.5 million for these children to help cover the high cost of college. Lelia-Help Tulley, legislative staff assistant, touched upon the need to keep such services going strong. The group primarily gets donations from individuals nationwide, but is seeing a gradual increase in the number of businesses contributing to the effort.

"There's a definite interest to raise funds for our children who have become fatherless and motherless from the war," Help-Tulley said.

Council delegates Larry Noble, David Shondee, and Larry Anderson, all of whom are part of the Human Services Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council and who advocate heavily on behalf of Navajo veterans, spoke briefly about the bell and expressed their appreciation to veterans nationwide. Anderson concluded the event singing an honor song.

"It's not everyday we get to see the Liberty Bell," Anderson said.

The Pony Express will be staying in Window Rock overnight and will continue on their journey to Phoenix, Ariz. Hall said the preemptive presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama will have the next opportunity to ring the Liberty Bell at the annual American Legions conference.

