



Winter Council Session
Monday, January 26, 2015
Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker

Sanders and Chambers Liquor Licenses

Within the last quarter, there has been significant progress involving the liquor licenses owned by Gary McDonald, who pled guilty to numerous felony charges and is set to be sentenced to prison in February. In recent months, McDonald continued his efforts to have two of his four licenses transferred to George Ryan, a close friend and associate.

Recently, the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, Office of the Speaker, and the Renewal of Hope Task Force with the assistance of Arizona Sen. Carlyle Begay led a successful effort to deny the transfer of the licenses. On Jan. 8, the Arizona Liquor Board unanimously denied the transfer as dozens of Nahata Dziil residents looked on during the hearing. Legislative Staff Assistant Steven Calniptewa provided critical testimony at the hearing.

Although the recent developments seem promising, there remains significant work ahead to ensure that the Navajo communities affected by the liquor licenses are no longer plagued. At the scheduled sentencing hearing for McDonald, the presiding judge will have the authority to revoke the licenses owned by McDonald. It is critical that the Office of the Speaker continues to work aggressively with all entities.

Sacred Sites Sub-Committee - Repatriation of Sacred Masks

In the latter part of 2014, it became apparent that numerous sacred Navajo masks were set to be auctioned in Paris, France. The Navajo Nation sent a delegation comprised of representatives from the Legislative and Executive Branches to Paris to bid on the masks. The Office of the Speaker worked diligently to ensure that once the masks were purchased, that the objects would be returned safely.

In addition, the Office of the Speaker met with representatives from the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation to have traditional prayers and ceremonies conducted for the masks prior and during the return of them to the Navajo Nation. The Office of the Speaker successfully led the efforts along with the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission and the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department, and safely returned the masks.

Public Hearings - \$554 Million Trust Settlement

In October, the Office of the Speaker concluded a total of seven public hearings held on and off the Navajo Nation. In July, the Council's Naabik'iyati' Committee issued a directive to the Office of the Speaker to hold public hearings on the issue.

The Office of the Speaker conducted public hearings in Shiprock, Chinle, Window Rock, Shonto, Crownpoint, Phoenix, and Albuquerque. The hearings drew a total of over 1,100 people with nearly 900 comments submitted, verbal and written. The Office of the Speaker compiled a report which detailed the recommendations from the public from each of the public hearings. The report was published and made available electronically and in hard copy across the Navajo Nation and in Phoenix and Albuquerque. The information will be useful in determining how the \$554 million settlement funds should be used and/or invested to best benefit the Navajo people.

Energy

The Navajo Nation continues to face a number of challenges within the energy industry with the threat of climate change, expiring tax credits, record lows in oil prices and ever changing regulations in an attempt to transition the U.S. Government to more clean energy resources.

With so much uncertainty, our energy projects become stalled; energy investors become coy and reserved, waiting for signs of stability and structure. So begins the work of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council in establishing that structure, first with the election of the Speaker of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council and the task of inspiring 24 Delegates to come together as one, despite the myriad of differences that compel them otherwise. Next come's the challenging task of populating the five Standing Committees with the experience of projects and challenges currently pressing on the Nation with the rejuvenated passion and energy of new ideas and drive.

Next come's the populations of Boards, Commissions, Shareholder Representatives and Sub-Committees and the stability of our Nation becomes more evident. One such Sub-Committee is the NABI Energy Task Force, which will need new direction and vision to meet the energy needs of our Nation. This Committee will be charged with implementing the Navajo Nations Energy Policy, particularly the establishment of a Navajo Nation Department of Energy. Wisdom, vision and passion will guide this process as a new structure is created and a budget formulated to present to the oversight Committees and eventually the Navajo Nation Council for approval during the 2016 budget cycle.

With the Development of the Navajo Nation Department of Energy, we will have an established depository of vital energy statistics and knowledge as well as a staff of energy experts to guide the energy projects of the Nation. As lawmakers of the Navajo Nation, we will be looking to you to establish a working environment of efficiency, transparency and teamwork as we traverse into the next four years of your service to our people.

Navajo Health Care Issues

There is continued monitoring and assistance to improve the overall health care system on the Navajo Nation. Legislation No. 0346-13 was introduced by Delegate Dwight Witherspoon to create a Navajo Department of Health. The legislation significantly changes the Navajo Division of Health to allow oversight and regulating of all health care services on the Navajo Nation.

After numerous meetings to change the original legislation, the final legislation was approved by the 22nd Navajo Nation Council on October 24, 2014. On November 6, 2014, President Ben Shelly enacted Resolution CO-50-14 into law. As result of the enactment, a workgroup was assigned to draft the Plan of Operation for the Division of Health.

Currently, Navajo Division of Health is developing a Plan of Operation that will be presented before the Health, Education, and Human Services oversight committee for approval. NDOH was advised to wait to present the Plan of Operation until the 23rd Navajo Nation Council took office. NDOH is developing regulations that will affect entities and businesses across the Navajo Nation. These include home health agencies, non-emergent transport companies, and other entities that work within the health care fields.

Lastly, NDOH is working with the Navajo Public Health Assessment work group to determine long term goals and objectives that will benefit the Navajo Nation. The work continues to inform the Navajo people of the impact of this legislation.

The Cobell Land Buy-Back Program

The process of creating a cooperative agreement for conducting the Land Buy-Back Program on the Navajo Nation was completed on April 30, 2014. The program has a directive to complete the buy-back for a number of tribes across the United States with each having a set time period of its own. The program will be completed in four phases: Outreach, Land Research, Land Valuation, and Land Acquisition. Determining the phases that the Navajo Nation will complete is the purpose of the cooperative agreement.

The Cooperative Agreement was completed and sent to the U.S. Department of the Interior. On May 15, 2014, the Navajo Nation was selected among other tribes for participation in the Land Buy-Back Program. Federal program implementation is planned for calendar year 2015.

Staff to continue working with Mr. McClanahan and the Executive Branch as we continue to discuss the overall framework for the Navajo Nation's Buy-Back Program plan. The next months will examine the impact that implementation will have on the land users, permit issues, title issues, and office establishment.

The last meeting held was on December 9, 2014 in Albuquerque, NM. The scope of work and priority list was discussed in order to address the final outstanding issues of the cooperative agreement. In attendance were: Delegate Danny Simpson, Delegate Leonard Tsosie, Delegate George Apachito, and Delegate Charles Damon all of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council. Director Sharon Pinto and Ms. Santee Lewis of the Cobell Buy-Back Program also attended in addition to various staff members from the Department of the Interior.

Two outstanding issues that were discussed during the December 9th meeting was the process of mass appraisal and the process of mineral valuation. Both topics were debated in the best interest of the allottees and the Navajo Nation. As a result, a request for a follow-on meeting was made to the Department of Interior. The next meeting with the Department of Interior will occur on January 30, 2015.

23rd Navajo Nation Council Orientation

The Office of the Speaker initiated plans to provide transition from one administration to the next and several orientations for the incoming Navajo Nation Council. The Office of the Speaker held several orientation sessions for the entire Council to provide valuable and essential information so as to provide a smoother transition from the previous Council to the current.

The topics were plentiful and perhaps overwhelming. However, the issues at hand are critical to the Navajo people, whom the Council is charged to serve. The orientation sessions have proven to be a valuable experience and have set the new Council on a path to success and prosperity.