



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Leaders Witness Keel Laying of USNS Navajo

HOUMA, La. – Oct. 30, 2019 – Speaker of the Navajo Nation Seth Damon and Former Miss Navajo Jocelyn Billy-Upshaw authenticated the keel for the future USNS Navajo at the Gulf Island Shipyard on October 30, 2019 in Houma, Louisiana.



PHOTO: 23rd Navajo Nation Council Speaker LoRenzo Bates, former Council Delegate Jonathan Hale, Chief of Staff LaShawna Tso, 24th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon, Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Delegate Raymond Smith, and Delegate Charlaine Tso stand in front of the keel of the future USNS Navajo at the Gulf Island Shipyard on October 30, 2019.

Ms. Billy-Upshaw was chosen to be the sponsor of the naval vessel, which is the first in an entirely new class of T-ATS vessels capable of performing towing and humanitarian functions for the US Navy. The new class of ships called Navajo was announced earlier this year.

“We lay this keel for future generations. We plant this seed for them,” said Jocelyn Billy-Upshaw, former Miss Navajo Nation. Ms. Billy-Upshaw is the ship’s sponsor, who takes on a special role throughout the ship’s life.

MEDIA CONTACT: Byron C. Shorty, Sr. Public Information Officer, (928) 287-2085, nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Ms. Billy-Upshaw pointed out that the naming of the the ship and the new class will create opportunities for everyone to discuss the contributions of Navajo people to the Armed Forces. She acknowledged that Navajo people have served at higher rates per capita in the Armed Forces than many other demographics.

“We thank the work of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council for bringing this to fruition. We also thank the late Senator John McCain and former Arizona State Senator Carlyle Begay for taking this to the Secretary of the Navy for consideration. Our veterans are honored, and we extend our appreciation to the United States on their behalf,” said 24th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon.

The USNS Navajo will be built by Gulf Island Shipyards at its facility in Houma, Louisiana. The ship is expected to be completed within a year, after which a christening ceremony will be held and the ship will begin its service life for the Navy.

Former Speaker LoRenzo Bates of the Navajo Nation Council and former Council Delegate Jonathan Hale, who sponsored the legislation that began the process, were also in attendance. Speaker Bates gave a history of the Navajo Nation Council’s efforts to present the proposal to the Secretary of the Navy for consideration.

“What began in 2014 is this effort to recognize our veterans and those that served this country. It began with our Council, acting to ensure the Navajo name was put forward to serve in this important capacity,” said 23rd Navajo Nation Council Speaker LoRenzo Bates.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez was also in attendance and presented an overview of the Long Walk and the Treaty of Bosque Redondo.



PHOTO: Former Miss Navajo Jocelyn Billy-Upshaw speaks at the keel-laying ceremony for the future USNS Navajo on the importance of the decision to name the new class of Navy vessels after the Diné people on October 30, 2019.

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