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PRESIDENT JONATHAN NEZ
VICE PRESIDENT MYRON LIZER

STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION ADDRESS

2020 WINTER NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL SESSION

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WELCOME ADDRESS

President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer

Yá'át'ééh to the honorable members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, Speaker Seth Damon, Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne, as well as chapter, county, state, and federal leaders, and most importantly our Diné Citizens. On behalf of the Nez-Lizer Administration, we are pleased to present to you the State of the Navajo Nation Address for the 2020 Winter Council Session.

A little over one-year ago, on January 15, 2019, we along with the 24th Navajo Nation Council took the sacred oath of office bestowed upon us by the votes of the Navajo people. During our campaign, we visited over 75 chapters and we listened to the issues and concerns brought forth by the people – we spent many hours meeting and documenting these issues. Based on the voices of the Navajo people, our administration developed the "Hozhó Diné bi Nahat'á" document to drive our work and commitment for the Navajo People. This document, based on the priorities of the Navajo People, continues to guide our administration's divisions, departments, and programs to serve our people and our communities.

As we have previously stated, our administration believes that change presents an opportunity – the opportunity to work together to strengthen and empower our people and our communities through the teaching we know as, "T'áá hwó' ajít'éego," or self-reliance and self-determination. The Nez-Lizer Administration continues to reinforce this teaching throughout the Navajo Nation, particularly among our young people.

In the past year, we have visited many Navajo communities and we have brought our administration's Division Directors into the communities to gain a better perspective of the needs and priorities in the communities and to make them available to offer their expertise and assistance – this was a campaign mandate from the Navajo people and we have made good on it. Through these efforts, we have gained support from our Navajo people for initiatives that will provide long-term benefits for our Navajo people including a $50 million scholarship investment, a new vision for energy development based on renewable resources, and much more.

In the coming year, in addition to the ongoing initiatives we intend to focus on creating more positive changes within the Executive Branch by reviewing and changing plans of operations for our programs and divisions that promote efficiency and effectiveness. With anticipated declines in revenues for the Nation, it is also incumbent upon us and the 24th Navajo Nation Council to work together to take measures to be more fiscally responsible and to cut unnecessary expenses.

We understand that we cannot create change and move our Nation forward on our own, we need the partnership and support of the 24th Navajo Nation Council and others. Our administration stands ready to work together with chapter, grazing, land board, farm board, and school board officials/members, as well as county, state, and federal leaders and officials.

To the members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, we look forward to working together to develop and complete projects and initiatives that benefit our Navajo people and communities. We assure you that our administration will continue working with you to create a better future for all of our people.

Most importantly, to our Diné people who placed us in these positions of leadership, we thank you for your support, encouragement, and prayers. Thank you for holding your leaders accountable as we move forward. God bless each of you, and God bless our great Navajo Nation! Ahe'hee'

A New Vision for Energy Development

On Jan. 15, 2020, the Háyoołkáał Work Group announced a partnership with Salt River Project to seek proposals for the development of up to200-megawatts of solar energy on the Navajo Nation. SRP issued a Request for Proposals on Wednesday for up to 400-megawatts of solar power development – 200 megawatts will be dedicated for a solarproject on the Navajo Nation that will deliver power to the SRPtransmission system.

It's the beginning of a new era for the Navajo Nation — the start of newopportunities. We recognize that coal-based energy provided many benefits for the workers and their families, but times are changing and energy development is changing. As Diné people, we have always been resilient in times of change, and that's what we are doing by seeking developers for up to 200-megawatts of solar development with SRP. We are looking to become the leader in renewable energy throughout the Southwest and Indian Country.

Throughout this process, the Háyoołkáał Work Group has had a seat at the table in determining the criteria and requirements that are spelled out in the RFP that was issued. We will continue to work together with SRP to ensure that the proposals are vetted carefully and that the Nation benefits from this project.

In the state of New Mexico, the Háyoołkáał Work Group, Council Delegate Wilson Stewart, Jr., and staff from the Office of the Speaker recently met with officials from PNM Resources, Inc. to receive reports on energy issues and initiatives. The majority of discussion focused on the future of Four Corners Power Plant, which uses coal supplied from the nearby Navajo Mine. The coal provides annual revenues for the Navajo Nation's General Fund, which is part of our annual Comprehensive Budget. It's imperative that our administration and the 24th Navajo Nation Council continue to meet with PNM and other stakeholders and that we continue to monitor the status of the Four Corner Power Plant.

Navajo Nation Energy Office

The Háyoołkáał Work Group will continue serving as the primary clearinghouse for energy projects along with the Navajo Nation Energy Office when it is established. The office was funded with approximately $663,000 in the current year's budget, however, enabling legislation to officially create the office was previously tabled by the Navajo Nation Council. We remain ready to implement the energy office to assume many of the ongoing initiatives in collaboration with the Háyoołkáał Work Group. We request the support of the 24th Navajo Nation Council to proceed with the establishment of the energy office to move initiatives forward.

Solar Development Projects

The Nez-Lizer Administration through the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office has made progress with the development of the Bisti Solar project in the community of Huerfano, New Mexico. The project would use approximately 660-acres of land in Huerfano for the 100-megawatt solar utility scale development.

Working together with the 24th Navajo Nation Council, New Mexico State Legislature, and Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, we were successful in lobbying for an additional $2 million in Capital Outlay Funds from the state of New Mexico last year for the solar project. Since then, the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources has selected NextGen Energy as the developer of the project and a project manager to oversee the construction and completion of the project, which is anticipated to begin producing solar powered electricity in the coming years – another big step forward in renewable energy for the Nation.

Acquisition of 500 Megawatts of Transmission

On Dec. 28, 2019, working together with the 24th Navajo Nation Council, we took a major step forward to acquire the rights to 500-megawatts along the Navajo Generating Station transmission lines that will allow the Nation to earn revenue from the use or marketing of transmission of electrical power.

We thank the 24th Navajo Nation Council for supporting legislation approving $1.9 million from the Nation's Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance for payment to the Bureau of Reclamation for the annual capital costs associated with the 500MW.

The acquisition of the 500 megawatts places the Navajo Nation in the driver seat to determine its own energy future in accordance with the Háyoołkáał Proclamation, which states that the Nation will pursue and prioritize renewable energy development for the long-term benefit of the Navajo people.

This milestone marks the beginning of a new era for the Navajo Nation — the start of new opportunities. We recognize that NGS provided many benefits for the workers and their families, but times are changing and energy development is changing. The demand for coal-based energy is no longer at its peak, not only in our region but across the country. As Diné people, we have always been resilient in times of change, and that's what we are doing by pursuing renewable energy options. We are looking to become the leader in renewable energy throughout the Southwest and Indian Country.

Just Transition Fund

Power plants across the country continue to close and communities and people are being impacted. Recently, we met with the members of the Arizona Corporation Commission and called on the members to establish a just transition fund, to help offset the financial impacts and shortfalls for communities affected by the closure of power plants, including non-Navajo communities like Springerville and Joseph City.

For the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, and the former employees and their families, the closure of NGS and Kayenta Mine have real impacts. We conveyed these concerns to the Arizona State Legislature during the 25th Annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day on Jan. 15, 2020. Our administration, through the Háyoołkáał Work Group, will continue to advocate for the creation of a just transition fund by the Arizona Corporation Commission. We welcome the members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council to join us in supporting this effort to help our Navajo communities impacted by these closures.

Permanent Trust Fund Interest Income Five-Year Plan

First and foremost, we extend our appreciation to the 24th Navajo Nation Council and members of the former 23rd Navajo Nation Council for working together with the Office of the President and Vice President to finalize and approve the $150 million Permanent Trust Fund Interest Income Five-Year Plan in 2016. Through this effort, we now have many new businesses including groceries stores, gas stations, markets, and other retail businesses in several of our communities, hundreds of new jobs, new tax revenues, and more consumer options for our Navajo people.

With the closure of the Navajo Generating Station and Kayenta Mine, our Nation's annual revenue has declined by approximately $30 to $50 million. In December, we presented a five-year plan to the Budget and Finance Committee that proposes to use the interest income earned from the Permanent Trust Fund, not the principal, to help fund the Nation's Comprehensive Budget for the next five years to ensure that direct services continue for the Navajo people.

We extend our appreciation to Budget and Finance Committee Chair Jamie Henio for his support in sponsoring the legislation to put forth this proposal to the Navajo Nation Council. We are willing to discuss this five-year plan with Council members as we move closer to the start of the budget season. Before our administration considers funding new projects, we need to address the budget shortfall for the coming years to ensure that direct services are provided for the Navajo people and our communities first and foremost.

Additional Resources for Division of Community Development

Within the last four years, the Navajo Nation has approved well over $300 million for infrastructure, chapter, and economic development projects in many of our communities. While we applaud these efforts to improve our Nation, there remains a great need for additional funds and resources to provide the personnel and expertise within the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development to manage and complete these projects.

Under the leadership of Division of Community Development Executive Director Dr. Pearl Yellowman, the Capital Projects Management Department is working very hard to ensure that the projects are progressing, however, within the department there is only one planner, one registered architect, one compliance officer, and 13 field project managers. The ratio of project managers compared to the number of projects is 1 to 30, meaning that each individual project manager is overseeing 30 separate projects at any given time – this is not conducive for the completion of these critical projects.

We are packaging a legislation to request $4 to $5 million in additional funds to hire more qualified personnel with the experience and expertise to expedite and complete these projects. With the support and approval of these funds by the 24th Navajo Nation Council, we will see more projects breaking ground and more benefits for our communities.

A Step Forward for Road Improvements

On Jan. 20, 2020, the Nez-Lizer Administration took a major step forward to improve roads in our communities by acquiring 1,250 acres of private land near the Indian Wells community, which includes the fully-operational Brimhall Sand and Rock gravel pit that currently has 15 to 25 years of gravel and sand resources remaining.

Through the combined efforts of the Navajo Land Department, Division of Transportation, Division of Natural Resources, Department of Justice, and the Office of the President and Vice President, we were able to come to terms with the owners of the lands known as Section 3 and Section 11. With this purchase, the Navajo Nation is in the driver seat to produce sand and gravel resources that can be used for road improvement projects in our communities at a lesser cost than having road materials transported into the Navajo Nation from outside companies.

$50 Million Investment in Scholarships

As leaders for our people, we often say that our children are the future of our people and our Nation. We have thousands of young Navajo people who are currently enrolled in colleges, universities, and trade schools and we have many more who are striving to pursue their higher education. Reports from the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance clearly show that our Nation does not have adequate scholarship funds to help all of our students.

For this reason, we call upon the 24th Navajo Nation Council to support legislation to invest $50 million from the Síhasin Fund to create a scholarship endowment that will serve as the seed money to create more scholarship funds for the future of our students. Legislation No. 0238-19 was previously tabled by the Council. Since then, we have met with several Council members to discuss how we can work together to move this initiative forward. We fully support the legislation that you will soon consider and we ask that you approve this measure for the future of our children and our Nation.

Navajo Nation Board of Education

Our administration extends our appreciation to the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee for supporting and confirming our appointments of six new members to the Navajo Nation Board of Education. The six new members com-

plete the 11-member board, which also includes five elected members from each Navajo agency – marking the first time the board has had full membership in many years.

The six new Navajo Board of Education members are:

- Dr. Pauletta J. White has served in the classroom in several capacities including a teacher, guidance counselor, and administrator for 34 years in the public school system. She is currently the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services with Gallup McKinley County School overseeing the departments of special education, Indian education, English, bilingual education, counseling, libraries, and home school liaisons. Dr. White will serve a six-year term as the school administration representative on the board.
- Andrea K. Thomas is a 5th grade teacher at Mesa Elementary in Shiprock, New Mexico and has over five years of teaching and managing experience in the classroom. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education from the University of New Mexico and serves on the New Mexico Teacher Leader Network and the New Mexico Teacher Evaluation Task Force. She will serve a six-year term as the teacher representative on the board.
- Emerson John currently serves as a Culture Liaison Specialist at Tséhootsooí Medical Center in Ft. Defiance, Arizona and previously served as a traditional coordinator at the Navajo Nation Division of Behavioral Health Services. He is also a member of the Diné Hataałi Association and certified as a Navajo practitioner. He will serve a six-year term as one of two traditional Navajo culture representatives on the board.
- Joan Benally is a mother and grandmother who currently teaches social studies to 7th and 8th graders at Kayenta Boarding School. She has worked at the school in various capacities over the last 10 years. She earned a degree in education from Northern Arizona University and is currently pursuing a master's degree from NAU as well. She will serve a six-year term as one of two parent representatives on the board.
- Spencer J. Willie serves as a project manager for Tribal-D, Inc. software company that serves tribal governments and organizations. He also has extensive experience in government relations and previously worked with Navajo Housing Authority, Navajo Nation Head Start, and Rough Rock Community School. He has a Master's in Public Administration and a Bachelor's of Science in Political Science from Southern Utah University. He will serve a six-year term as one of two parent representatives on the board.
- Dr. Henry Fowler currently serves as the Dean of Graduate Studies at Navajo Technical University (NTU). Among his extensive professional experience, he previously served as the chair of Undergraduate Diné Studies at NTU, chair of Math/Physics/Technology at Diné College and Dean of Faculty, and as the vice chair of the Navajo Nation Commission on Navajo Government Development. He earned a doctorate degree in education from Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara, CA, a Master's in Education from Northern Arizona University (NAU), and a Bachelor of Science in secondary math education also from NAU. He will serve a six-year term as one of two traditional Navajo culture representatives on the board.

University of Arizona Navajo Law Fellowship Program

On November 3, we were joined by Miss Navajo Nation Shaandiin Parrish as our administration finalized a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Arizona at the James E. Rogers School of Law, which established the Navajo Law Fellowship Program with the overall goal of increasing the number of Navajo law school graduates and creating pathways to legal careers.

The new fellowship program is an investment in the future of the Navajo Nation, and also empowers young Navajo people to determine their own future and creates another pathway for Navajo students to come home and give back to their communities. Under the terms of the MOA, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance and the University of Arizona will partner to match financial aid awards to Navajo law school students who are part of the fellowship program.

In addition, first-year law school students will receive academic advisement, information, and an overview of the Navajo Nation legal system and legal career possibilities within the Navajo Nation. They will also be placed in a summer honors externship that may include rotations through selected Navajo Nation law offices, court locations, legal aid offices and other placements.

Second-year students will be offered a course on Navajo Nation law and the legal system. The summer externships will build on the first-year experiences and include a workshop that helps to prepare for the Navajo Nation Bar Exam. Third-year students will participate in a workshop that prepares them for the Arizona Bar Exam and Navajo Nation placement following the exam.

As part of the program, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance will also provide additional funds to cover a portion of fees for students who are admitted to and attend the Pre-Law Summer Institute at the University of New Mexico and fees for the state bar exam application and the Bar Review course necessary to help prepare for the bar exam.

These are the types of partnerships that the Navajo Nation is creating to build our future using the knowledge and ingenuity of our young Diné students and professionals. We are also working with Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University to partner on energy issues that help our Navajo communities and to build a sustainable energy future for our Nation.

Financial Assistance for Navajo Veterans

We commend the 24th Navajo Nation Council's Health, Education, and Human Services Committee for their approval of legislation on Jan. 8, 2020 that will allow the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration to develop new internal policies to make the financial assistance process more efficient and easier for Navajo veterans across the Navajo Nation.

Since coming on board as the Executive Director for the Navajo Veterans Administration, James Zwierlein has focused on improving policies to help our veterans. This legislation creates a path for the Veterans Administration to change financial assistance procedures and to make financial assistance available at the agency level. The Navajo people want us, as leaders, to work together to reduce and eliminate red tape and to restructure internal processes and that's what we did with this legislation.

Legislation No. 0375-19 sponsored by Council Delegate Paul Begay, amends the financial assistance policy for the Navajo Nation Veterans Trust Fund by removing language that often led to setbacks in obtaining financial assistance for veterans. Under the leadership of Director Zwierlein, the Navajo Veterans Administration will now be able to revise the procedures to better streamline the process and make it more flexible, efficient, and accessible at the agency level. The Nez-Lizer Administration is very thankful for the support of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee.

Financing Public Safety/Judicial Facilities

In November 2015, the Navajo Nation and KeyBanc Capital Markets successfully closed a historic bond financing agreement that took decades to develop and that allowed the Nation to increase its financial leverage. The deal marked the first time in history that the Nation authorized the issuance of bonds on the world market.

The finalized deal allowed the Navajo Nation to refinance a $60 million loan, which was used along with stimulus funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2010 for the construction of public safety and judicial complex facilities across the Navajo Nation including the communities of Tuba City, Crownpoint, Ramah, and others.

Our Nation has the framework and experience to do something similar to help finance the construction of new judicial/public safety facilities for Fort Defiance, Pinon, Shiprock, and other communities. We do not have to re-invent the wheel when we already have a model in place that has been successfully, while also strengthening the financial portfolio for our Nation. Our administration stands ready to discuss financing options, rather than taking a large portion from the Síhasin Fund principal.

Managed Health Care in the State of New Mexico

Recently, we were joined by Navajo Nation Department of Health Executive Director Dr. Jill Jim as we met with New Mexico Human Services Department Secretary David Scrase, New Mexico Department of Indian Affairs Secretary Lynn Trujillo, and Medicaid Director Nicole Comeaux, to discuss the possibility of the Navajo Nation starting its own managed care organization to oversee Medicaid benefits for approximately 75,000 members of the Navajo Nation in the state of New Mexico.

Overall, we are encouraged by the state's assurance that they will continue working together with our administration, sharing information, and maintaining transparency with all entities involved in order to evaluate all factors and considerations before any further action is taken. Secretary Scrase stressed that the state of New Mexico is obligated and committed to ensuring tribal consultation is honored by the New Mexico Human Services Department.

The top priority for our administration is protecting the health plan options for our Navajo people, first and foremost. We believe this process should be very transparent to allow our Nation's leaders to make an informed decision based on clear facts. We believe transparency and freedom of choice and tribal individual self-determination is key in this process as it deals with the healthcare for thousands of our Navajo people. There must be communication at the chapter level to ensure our Navajo people, particularly our elders, are fully informed of their options before they make a decision. Our administration strongly supports active enrollment for all members of our Nation – our people must have the option to choose their health care provider.

Supporting Lee Bergen for New Mexico Court of Appeals

Our administration is proud to support Honorable Lee Bergen, a member of the Navajo Nation, to be appointed to serve on the New Mexico Court of Appeals. On January 21, 2020, we delivered a letter of support to New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham recommending his appointment.

He is a husband, father, and brother who currently serves as the Chief Justice of the Pueblo of Isleta Appellate Court. He has practiced law for over 30 years in the state of New Mexico in the areas of litigation, business transactions, state and federal regulatory issues, and civil law.

Chief Justice Bergen earned his juris doctorate from the University of Minnesota Law School. His previous experience includes serving as a staff attorney for the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, as a partner with Nordhaus, Haltom, Taylor, Taradash and Frye, LLP, and as the owner of Bergen Law Offices, LLC.

We ask the members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council to join us in supporting Honorable Lee Bergen to serve on the New Mexico Court of Appeals.

New Jobs for Navajo People

Our Navajo want jobs and that's what our administration and the 24th Navajo Nation Council created on Nov. 11, 2019, when we signed into law Resolution CO-31-19, appropriating approximately $19 million from the Síhasin Fund for the Church Rock Industrial Park Project Fund Expenditure Plan to develop a nitrile glove manufacturing facility and create up to 350 new jobs for our Navajo people in its first phase.

This project is a great example of what partnerships can do to bring economic opportunities to the Navajo Nation. The manufacturing plant will help individuals needing jobs to provide for their families. This would not have been possible without past leadership and the collaboration of all the three branches of the Navajo government and the Division of Economic Development under the leadership of Executive Director JT Willie. As the project develops further, more jobs will be created for our Navajo people. We thank the 24th Navajo Nation Council for their support of this initiative.

Completion of Earthen Dam Repairs

On November 15, our administration met with community members and local officials in the community of Tolani Lake, Ariz. to announce the completion of repairs to three earthen dams in the Former Bennet Freeze Area, while work continues on other local dams. This fulfills a commitment that we made during a separate meeting with Tolani Lake residents where we committed to advancing water projects including water line extensions, installation of water tanks, earthen dam repairs, and water resources for livestock and agriculture.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer met with officials with the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources and the Water Management Branch to identify and secure more resources to help local residents. Tariq Najam with the Department of Water Resources also announced that the Nation will receive new heavy equipment soon, and will designate certain equipment specifically to make improvements for the Former Bennet Freeze Area communities. Our administration remains committed to continuing with earthen dam repairs and other improvements for our communities.

President Trump signs Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Executive Order

In November, Vice President Myron Lizer and Second Lady Dottie Lizer joined President Donald Trump in the Oval Office, for the signing of an executive order to establish an inter-agency task force to address the epidemic of missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska persons. U.S. Attorney Gen. William Barr, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, and other tribal leaders were also in attendance at the White House for the ceremony.

Tuesday's executive order will launch "Operation Lady Justice," a task force led by Attorney General Barr and Secretary Bernhardt to develop an aggressive, government-wide strategy to improve the safety of Native American communities. The order will also allow tribal and local law enforcement to seek assistance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Justice Department, who will conduct an in-depth review of federal databases to determine best practices for collecting data on missing and murdered Indigenous persons.

The murder rate is ten times higher than the national average for American Indian women, with 84-percent experiencing some form of violence during their lifetime. There is still no reliable way of knowing how many Native women go missing each year because the databases that hold statistics of these cases are outdated. Besides, issues have arisen due to the lack of coordination between law enforcement agencies.

President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Lizer also continue to support the Savanna's Act, which aims to protect American Indian women, men, and children from violent crimes. The Senate moved forward with its version in the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Committee earlier this week.

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#RESILIENCE

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