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Proud to be Navajo

FROM THE READERS, Feb. 24, 2011

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Every day you are taught a lesson. Until this day, I've always wondered what it was meant to say, "I am proud to be Navajo."

Truthfully, I used to laugh at the phrase because I seen being "Navajo" as a cause for many things in this world such as alcoholism, womanizing, drug use and corruption in government. I saw that "Navajo" was something of the past and we had to move forward to not be "Navajo" any longer.

I am a student at Fort Lewis College. I felt that to make it in this evolving world a "Navajo" could not exist, so, sadly I sought to be something else, a "wanna be".

While in my last class of the day, I sat there as two individuals talked with an elderly man about an upcoming project. They were talking about Facebook, cell phones, Internet and the significance of cable TV. As they were explaining it, the elderly gentleman kept interrupting asking about what Facebook was, how much it cost, how his Cellular One phone looked and saying he don't watch TV.

Yet, these two individuals got frustrated talking about it and asked, "Are you stupid to not know these things?" He just said, "No, I'm not stupid. I don't know what those things are."

I sat there and felt offended because I see two young kids disrespecting an elder. I then told them, "There are more important things that exist in this world that doesn't amount up to technology and I don't appreciate your disrespect towards an elder."

The elder then began to speak of a time of how we all came to be on Earth, the origin story of Navajos, and how we evolve into human beings.

They then said, "That is not important to us so why should we listen to you, it doesn't apply to everyone," and they got up to walk away because class was over.

As I watched what unfolded in front of me I felt the pain of why there is talk of how the traditions are lost and felt what the elders must feel to watch the children act as they do in this year of 2011.

I sat there and thought, "I am proud to be Navajo, proud to be Diné." I'm proud to have grown up with my grandparents, proud to have played in the dirt, proud to have made slingshots, proud to have listened to KTNN, proud to have ate potatoes and spam, proud to have ate fry bread with lots of salt, proud to have sat

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in the back while going to town, proud to have pointed with my lips, proud to have played in the sheep corral, proud to have sat in the water trough in the summer, proud to have sang the Ye'í Bi Chei song, proud to have gone to a Squaw Dance, proud to have gone to Gallup on the first of the month with my grandparents, proud to have ate at Earl's, proud to be who I am.

Why do I strive to be something I am not and assimilate to the values and traditions of another?

At this point I realized that having a cell phone capable of getting on the Internet to update my Facebook page was not as significant to the traditions and values of my grandparents teachings.

A cell phone is what is called "Béesh bee hane'é", metal calling. I will now look forward and will think there is more to the material things in life like Facebook and cell phones and spend more time to learn more about what it is to be Navajo and proud of it. So, I will always and first be a Navajo.

Lin Pablo
Kirtland, N.M.

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Utilities can, should clean up power plants

I am an artist. I believe my Diné clans and Hopi heritage have innately endowed me with divine artistic gifts from the Creator that many indigenous people believe in. As I state this I may be dismissed by many, for as I see it American society does not hold much regard for artists, or even indigenous people, but I am happy about these facts of my life.

As an artist I truly believe the human senses are heightened, so it seems I am often very aware of my immediate surroundings, this includes the natural environment, especially the air I breathe as I daily walk to find my inspiration. As I compose this letter it is an unfortunate fact that the air quality of the San Juan Valley, the ancestral homelands of Diné people, is heavy-laden with poisonous toxins.

As I see it, this issue has nothing to do with who supports or who does not support the power plants, for it is a matter of respect for the people.

The responsibility for cleaning up the air the people breathe on a daily basis should be a no-brainer response.

The responsibilities of those in the coal-fired power plant industry should know what they must do. I often wonder if they have a conscious.

Even the little children are taught to clean up after themselves. So I ask those individuals who sit in the lavish offices above the smokestacks, in the most humble way, "Why don't you want to clean up the air in the San Juan Valley? Don't you think the lives of the residents of the area is worthy of clean air? And, don't you believe in the human right to clean air for all people??

In regards to the Diné, the people, and their lands that the power plants are built upon, give us the respect if anything. Our culture and ways of life teach respect for all living things, it is a moral code. Yet, there is no respect for the Diné as the power plants in their defiance in contributing to cleaning up the air, are basically saying that they don't care about the Diné as they continue to spew poisons into the air where the spiritual beings and winged ones live.

To the Navajo Tribal Council, I say if you truly believe in the act of sovereignty, then why do you not demand the air your Diné people breathe is free of toxic poisons such as nitrogen oxide? And, to the new president and his administration, it is you who claim to carry the traditions of the Diné elders and their teachings that instill that one must respect Nahasaan Shima, how will you contribute to respecting such ways of life? Or will you continue to pretend not to hear voices of the people and continue what seems to be the instilling of the ways of Anglo-colonialist thought about finding and conquering the so-called American Dream?

As leaders you are responsible for the mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing of the people. If the people cannot breathe they cannot live in balance.

With about 1,000 Navajo employed at the two power plants that leaves about 340,000 of Dine who are not a part of that club and I ask again, "Does the air we breathe matter?"

With the millions made from these two plants I would think they would be responsible, pay and give us a chance to breathe clean air.

Venaya Yazzie
Huerfano, N.M.

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Lovejoy: New 4 Corners lease a bad deal

The Honorable Ben Shelly:

As a state senator representing 16 Navajo chapter communities in District 22 and as a member of the Navajo Nation, I write this letter in response to the Arizona Public Service lease extension for the Four Corners Power Plant that was approved by the Navajo Nation Council on Feb. 15, 2011.

The honorable speaker, Johnny Naize, states "Numerous hours of negotiation were spent to create a fair revised agreement for the Navajo people." The lease extension will guarantee a meager annual payment of \$7 million for 25 years.

Before you put your signature to the Council approved APS lease, I urge you to seriously evaluate the impression that this is a "fair" agreement for the Navajo people. Are you willing to veto this measure and return it to the Council to ask, "Is this the best you can do? Please bring forward a better deal."

For decades, our people have been presented offers by the federal government and large corporate businesses that were gleamed as "fair" and "beneficial" to our people. Time and time again, our leaders approved these important agreements only to realize disenchanting and disappointing results. The most recent in memory would be the Peabody leases which is now recognized as egregiously disadvantageous and exploitative to our people, yet it was initially approved by our leaders with fanfare.

I believe this agreement falls in the same category. This past year, APS reported a net profit of \$251,225,000. Seven million dollars, the highlighted and boasted annual payments to the nation, equates to 0.027 percent of that net profit. We are blessed with the fact that we have natural resources located on Dinétah to use for development and growth to benefit our people.

Arizona Public Service will be in the region even at a higher royalty rate than was negotiated. They already committed to purchasing Southern Cal Edison's share in the plant and began negotiations with BHP for coal, all before the decision came from the Council. They have committed to an expanding energy portfolio, they have expanded their energy markets and with the closure of plants in the northern regions of the United States along with the difficulty in building new plants, APS is well situated to engage in a meaningful and equal royalty dialogue with the nation and the people.

Yet, this corporation has pressured the Council by giving the nation a deadline of March 2011 to approve the lease. If the nation were an equal partner in these negotiations, then why was the Council persuaded to a March 2011 deadline and why was it implied that failure to act would result in the loss of Navajo jobs?

What was the need for the established rush to approve this lease when APS still needs to secure approvals to buy out the newer units from Edison? Additionally, an APS senior vice president stated, "There will be no layoffs at the plant" when he was talking about the purchase of Edison's interest in the two new units and this predated the vote of the Council.

In the same release pointed out by APS, it asserted that the plant "Meets or exceeds all current state and federal environmental regulations..." As such, what was the justification for the rushed vote if APS has

established its intent and desire to secure Edison's interest while maintaining job levels and while exceeding governmental regulations? Was the Council told differently by APS?

Placing the Council on a deadline, which limited real and substantive dialogue on royalty rates with the overarching threat of lost jobs, may have been an effective strategy by APS, but it exacerbates the fact that, although sovereign, the nation will yield and relent to extorted pressure to the detriment of what is beneficial to our people, especially younger generations to come.

In their effort to become environmentally friendly, APS has expanded to the solar energy market and is expanding to a third solar park. As a basis of negotiation, did the nation insist that APS consider locating its next solar park on Navajo? By making a 25-year binding commitment with an established lease record (since 1963), I believe the nation should have been in a position to insist on some practical concessions with APS.

If the Council was able to have APS disclose their financial data adjusted for the effects of inflation, the calculated lease price should have been based according to indexes that value the nation's land asset on an upward incremental rate scale as opposed to a flat price for the number of years it agreed to, and it would provide for a more transparent representation.

President Shelly, I ask you: Is 0.027 percent of APS's net profit fair for the natural wealth of our Diné people considering the physiological harm the plant is causing on our people and the physical harm it is causing our land? If one partner in a negotiation is frightened by the imposition of another party, is that truly a dialogue begun and ended in Hózhó?

In our debates, I recall you repeating clearly that you would "play with the big boys" and you would establish a negotiation standpoint that would assure our people are treated fairly in negotiations. I call upon you to make this the defining point to embrace your rhetoric and lead the people to a true foundation with fair and honest negotiations that can be seen to benefit our people as opposed to allowing a corporation to exploit them under the guise of benefit.

Lynda M. Lovejoy
New Mexico State Senator
Santa Fe, N.M.

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Tribe can't be trusted with Shiprock shelter

Domestic violence and sexual assault only happens to someone else. Didn't you know?

The Shiprock Home for Women and Children is going to court against the Navajo Nation asking only to be granted ownership of the land where its unfinished new shelter sits. Didn't you know?

These two statements are as asinine as the court hearing and ruling by Judge Woody's court in Shiprock.

The Home for Women and Children have been providing shelter, safety and hope for a violence-free life to victim/survivors and their child victim witnesses since 1975. Its services have always been housed in Shiprock on the Northern Agency of the Navajo Nation.

As every organization, business or individual knows, the land belongs to the Navajo Tribe. No one is a landowner, because the land is entrusted by federal law to the Navajo Nation. In its 36 years of services, if Home for Women and Children has learned anything, it has learned about the Navajo tribal law on land ownership.

Home for Women and Children began its quest for a new shelter knowing the facility it was housed in was falling down. Contracts were let and the project began to take form in 2004. Sadly, the shelter's progress got caught in the tangled web of the Chester Carl allegations and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development stepping in asking the Navajo Housing Authority to get their house in order.

I became involved with the shelter construction in 2007 when I was asked to attend a meeting with HUD and NHA to collect information on how our project could be restarted. During that meeting, HUD announced that all new project funding would be placed on hold and the NHA was to get its files in order and to diligently work on getting the in-process projects completed.

Also at that meeting, I learned that approximately \$88 million was going back to the federal government because NHA had not earmarked the funds for tribal improvements. These funds were intended to help the Navajo people. What help did they receive with the funds reverting to the federal government?

Now, remember I said the meeting was in 2007, not 2008, not 2009, or even 2010.

Home for Women and Children is still waiting to get its shelter done. If the Navajo tribal government itself, or its branches of governments such as NHA, cannot get on track within this length of time, why should it even be considered or even allowed to step foot in the unfinished shelter where they have blocked completion for over four years? Oh, and by the way, the latest Navajo casino in Hogback, N.M., was constructed and opened in less than six months.

One of the comments in Judge Woody's ruling is that Home for Women and Children intentionally locked out the Navajo Nation. This is ludicrous. This site has sat virtually in limbo for the past four years with little or no site activity. Of course, there was a chain and lock on the shelter gate. Construction materials, tools and interior improvements wait like shadows in the dark to be used in finishing the structure.

Guess what? I bet if other construction sites that are unfinished are checked, there would be locks, gates and perhaps even security to make sure the materials stay where they are supposed to be. The Navajo Nation officials, as was any other interested parties, were always allowed entry. It was when the heavy hand of Navajo Department of Justice lawyer Luralene Tapahe intervened, cutting the locks and having access into the site. By the way, this was done without a court ruling yet.

Yes, Home for Women and Children has an agenda. It wants to protect, educate, shelter, feed and give hope to victim/survivors and their families. Nothing more, nothing less. It appears to me that the real issues revolving around this new shelter have been swept under the rug, ignored, or considered as insignificant.

This shelter is being constructed to provide safety and security to domestic violence and sexual assault victims. It is not being built to line the pockets of RJN Construction. It is not being built for the glory and praise of the executive director, staff and board of directors.

It is being built to provide a safe and secure place for the victims and their families who are running scared for their lives, with no means of transportation, no money in their pockets to provide for themselves and their children, and no one they feel they can trust to ask for help.

Is Home for Women and Children, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, with ties to the Navajo Nation, an approved tribal lease for the land where the partially constructed facility sits (which it has already begun paying its lease payments even though the shelter is unusable), and less than 14 percent of its annual operating budget coming from the Navajo Nation Division of Social Services, going to have the doors closed?

Remember the closure of the 14 Boys and Girls Clubs of the Navajo Nation Inc.? Do you recall the closures of the Four Corners Adolescence Treatment Center Inc.?

When asked at an Indian Affairs meeting held in Santa Fe on Feb. 4, 2011, whether the Navajo Nation intended to return operations of the Home for Women and Children facility to the current management upon completion of the construction, honorable President Ben Shelly was quiet. When asked again, he said he would have to take it under advisement.

What is the true agenda of the Navajo Nation? What is the purpose of slandering a reputable contractor who has built numerous other facilities on the Navajo Nation? Why does the Navajo Nation act like this final construction funding is the nation's money?

Where are the hearts of the Navajo council delegates and lawyer Tapahe who elect to draw out this saga, while victim/survivors and their families are sleeping in makeshift cubbies and rollaway beds, awaiting the doors to open at the new shelter site?

Wake up! Truly help your Navajo people. You may even be credited for saving a life.

Inez Garland
Farmington, N.M.

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Reason behind Tsosie vote on scholarship funding

In last week's edition of Navajo Times, a story entitled "Council OKs \$500,000 for scholarships" portrayed the Navajo Nation Council action as appropriating funds ... Delegate Joshua Butler identified my vote as the only vote against the scholarships.

The story is misleading because the legislation was not about appropriating funds for scholarships. It was about forcing the controller to advance unknown source of monies to replace the federal 638 scholarship funds. I was of the position that the controller had no authority to advance funds and that forcing him to do so was illegal. Thus, my "no" vote.

Further, the scholarship director advised us that an administrative solution was worked out before but the controller was not receptive to such a solution this time.

On Feb. 18, I inquired about the funds being made available. To my surprise, none of the funds supposedly advanced were made available yet.

It was unfortunate that the scholarships got caught up in the mix of the continuing budget resolution saga approved by the 21st Navajo Nation Council. At that time, I voted against such an effort because Navajo law calls for comprehensive budget and not continuing resolution budget. The continuing budget was the wrong decision to the detriment of students and other Navajo persons. The way to help students was to approve the budget so that the 638-funded scholarships can be released.

Instead, the budget was tabled by the Council with Delegate Butler as one of the delegates voting to table the budget. Tabling the budget did more damage to the early release of students' scholarships.

The \$500,000 advance did not work either. Now that the budget has been approved, the scholarships will be released.

Finally, I would like to state that I do not vote "no" for the fun of it. I support scholarships and went as far to ask Eastern Navajo Council and BIA budget people to re-identify scholarship and housing, instead of jail constructions, as priorities for the Navajo Nation.

Leonard Tsosie
Council Delegate
Window Rock, Ariz.

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Comply with Supreme Court

Dear Speaker Naize: The Hada á Sidi is a grassroots organization composed of Navajo citizens concerned with the transparent, ethical and legal operation of Navajo Nation government for the benefit of Navajo citizens. We have successfully brought legal action against the Navajo Nation government and its elected officials to act accordingly to Navajo Nation law.

We are sending you this letter to direct that you, your office and members of your staff be in full compliance with the Navajo Nation Supreme Court's ruling in Shirley v. Morgan, SC-CV-02-10, namely that: 1)

Commission members for the Navajo Government Development Commission be reconfirmed or confirmed immediately, and 2) the commission's budget be approved as soon as possible so that the commission may recommence its work to help form Navajo Nation government.

Additionally, we are requesting that the legislative chief of staff cease and desist all activities related to the commission and Office of Navajo Government Development.

In meeting the intent and spirit of Navajo Nation Title II and its amendments, members of the commission, meeting as a whole, retained the authority to: 1) select and appoint a director of the office; 2) approve policies and procedures for the office, and 3) exercise oversight of the office, among other things.

The Hada á Sidi strongly feels, where the commission and office is concerned, that any appointment of a director for the office, administrative actions, including the restructuring of office personnel, or office policies and procedures by the legislative chief of staff is misplaced.

The appropriate and proper authority to undertake these above-mentioned activities resides with the commission and not the legislative chief of staff. Such activities undertaken or proposed to be undertaken by the legislative chief of staff may contradict the Navajo Nation's Supreme Court ruling concerning the commission.

It is with this understanding of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court's ruling that the Hada á Sidi genuinely believes from a general observation of the functioning of Navajo Nation government that the legislative chief of staff may have taken unlawful liberties with the political and personal selection of a director for the office, the transfer of office personnel and with the administrative functioning of the commission and office.

If our beliefs are proven valid, which there is a very high likelihood that they will be, these actions taken by the legislative chief of staff, and by extension the Office of the Navajo Nation Speaker, is a blatant disregard for the solemn authority of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court, Navajo Nation law, and the authority of the commission to select and appoint a director for the office based upon a fair and reasonable process, and not one of political expediency as possibly demonstrated by the legislative chief of staff.

This being said, the Hada á Sidi are fully prepared to file pleadings with the Navajo Nation Supreme Court to more clearly discover the undertaking of the legislative chief of staff as related to the commission and office, and, based upon this discovery, that if the legislative chief of staff, and by extension the Office of the Navajo Nation Speaker, have defied the Navajo Nation Supreme Court's ruling, that you and the legislative chief of staff show cause for your actions concerning the commission and office.

On ending, the Navajo Nation Council has had more than enough reasonable time to work diligently to fulfill the Navajo Nation Supreme Court's order to re-confirm or confirm members of the commission, and to fund the commission and office with an approved budget. Further delay and muddling by the legislative chief of staff is inexcusable.

Considering the current efforts by the Navajo Nation Council and president and vice president to act in accordance with the mandates made known by citizens of the Navajo Nation and by the political oaths made by yourself and other Navajo elected officials during the recent Navajo election cycle to ensure the transparent and ethical operation of Navajo Nation government, we cannot stress more the importance of the timely reconfirmation or confirmation of members of the commission and the approval of the commission's budget.

We provide this letter in the sincere hope that litigation may be avoided. Please, be advised that this letter also serves as a final notice.

Milton Bluehouse Sr., President

Eddie Arthur, Member

Hada á Sidi

Ganado, Ariz.

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What is status of scholarship funds?

It is currently week number six or seven in most colleges and universities that many young Navajo students are attending. Many of these remarkable students have worked tremendously hard to meet the requirements of the Navajo Nation scholarship.

I am currently a graduate student working to get my master's in public administration at the University of New Mexico. I worked diligently during the fall 2010 semester to earn a GPA well above the minimum standards.

With the semester nearly halfway over, there is still no word, nor is there any direction, as to what is occurring with funds or the status of awards.

Last week an article appeared in the Navajo Times, "Council OKs \$500,000 for scholarships." What's going on with that? Where is the timeline? Lastly how can students get clear and real-time answers?

Attempts to contact ONNSFA headquarters have resulted in going directly to voicemail with no return calls. My attempts to get answers from agency staff resulted in "we are waiting for funds and we don't have any answers from the main office."

I believe that individuals at the community are getting the brunt of the unwarranted blame, while administration really needs to take responsibility for this situation.

As witnessed time and time again, Navajo government has favored relieving their needs before the needs of the people. If this funding was meant for a Las Vegas conference, funding would have been processed efficiently. Students only hope that the tortoise rate of the Navajo Tribe begins to move faster, more efficiently and more intelligently.

Last fall the current administration and new council promised prosperity, but it seems to have started off at an extremely slow pace. It is extremely frustrating.

The tribe consistently hounds the government for funding only to misuse it or have it returned due to the red tape and inefficiency of the Navajo government. They continually argue to the federal government that it is their responsibility per "treaty." Eventually the money gets substantially cut for overhead administrative purposes, overhead and other costs.

Where is the tribe's responsibility to its people? Then the excuse falls into "money is tight," yet leadership is not taken by administration to reorganize for maximum efficiency, therefore leading to the ease of cutting programs and leaving many out in the cold.

The Navajo government and all of its many agency directors, chairpersons and staff need to take more responsibility and activism in their line of work, because they serve us Navajo people. Mr. Shelly, as you proclaimed during your campaign, "I am coming home." Well the time is now. Come back down to earth and get things moving.

Council delegates, the time is now to prove that "24" is enough.

There are thousands of individuals out there who will remember the campaign promises made and if not, transcripts are all too easy to come by.

Finally, to the many thousands of students and individuals, who rely on programs like the Navajo scholarship office, hold your leaders accountable and do not be afraid to speak up.

Doug Capitan
Crownpoint, N.M.

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