

INAUGURAL ADDRESS
OF
RAYMOND NAKAI
CHAIRMAN OF THE NAVAJO TRIBAL COUNCIL
APRIL 13, 1963

MY FELLOW CITIZENS:

Today, as every four years, the Navajo people, their friends, well wishers and the seekers of their favor, assemble for the installation of a new Council and Chairman--a new Legislature and executive--in the undimmed hope that newly installed officers will lead America's largest Indian Tribe toward the varying goals of their hearts.

The goal toward which I propose to lead the Navajo people is the goal of all true Americans, is to a time when the free development of each individual is the condition for the free development of men--a government which respects the equal dignity of every human being as a child of the same Heavenly Father, a government in which all citizens have the same rights before the law, but more than that, rights which the law cannot take away, and responsibilities, too, in proportion to their gifts and achievements. It is government with a heart, whose helping hand is out to assist the unfortunate, not merely to keep alive in misery, but to create the greatest possible opportunity to revive their shattered confidence and realize their potential as human souls.

The future is no great mystery, at least in terms of our responsibility toward it for you and I the future is a baby named Ashkee, or a little girl named Bah, most of your obligation and mine can be stated in terms of what we owe them.

To achieve this goal I propose first, that the Navajo Nation adopt a written Constitution, with a Bill of Rights protecting the individual's freedom of speech, association, and religion. This, it has been said, will restrict, rather than enlarge,

PAGE TWO

the power of the Tribal Government. Let it be so, I shall never voluntarily surrender the ancient sovereignty of the Navajo people, or barter it away bit by bit, to private interests or other governments; but I will restrict the power of the Navajo Government toward the Navajo people. In my administration, agents will not be sent out from Window Rock to tell the Navajos they cannot worship God in the way they desire, or cannot join organizations of their own choosing to improve their pay and working conditions, nor will the political opponents of this administration be treated as an underground or otherwise than as citizens with equal rights to our own to assemble peaceably, express their views, however mistaken, and make their plans, petitions and demands.

Only he who makes his people strong, is strong, and only he who rules free men is great. This shall be the motto of my administration.

The problems which confront the Navajo Nation are out of all proportion to its relatively small size. One-half of our adult population is deprived of the vote for their own President and Representatives in Congress by State literacy laws. The average Navajo's income is less than half the average American's. The percentage of us with the higher education necessary to lead our people to freedom from hunger, want, and fear is a tiny portion of the national average. Unemployment on this Reservation is worse than in West Virginia.

I believe I know the solution to all these problems; but I do not claim I will solve them in the four years of my administration, or even that they will all be solved in the lifetime of anyone present. The solution is both simple and extremely difficult. It is the development of the Navajo individual--the forgotten man in the grandiose inflow from Window Rock which always seem to stop short of his door.

LET ME BE SPECIFIC: The permanent tribal scholarship trust fund must be increased and its purpose broadened. It would do little good to make more money available for college scholarships when our young people are inadequately prepared to

PAGE THREE

take advantage of what is now available. We must have a college preparatory school-- a Navajo Academy--to take the most promising of our boys and girls at the age of ten or twelve, and fit them by college age to meet the admission requirements of any university in this country, of the Service Academies, yes, even of foreign institutions of learning.

We need the Navajo Academy also to reduce to writing, preserve and expand our own history and literature in the Navajo language, and to keep us proud of our own Navajo cultural heritage, as we grow too sophisticated for the medicine man and local historian.

At the same time, we must not neglect the boys and girls whose talents lie in other directions. We need trade schools, right here on the Reservation, solid trade schools whose graduates can get good jobs in an economy demanding ever higher skills in the working people.

Cheap labor is no incentive for industry to come to this Reservation or anywhere else. We need trained people who can do the job--who can command high wages and earn every cent they are paid.

We need an adult education program to overcome in some measure the long years when no schools were available to the majority of our population--to give new hope to our most tragically disabled people--the able-bodied middle-aged who cannot speak English, some of whom have great manual skills, but cannot follow their trade to where the jobs are because they cannot speak English. We need to encourage and assist these people to educate their children. We must help the vegetable pickers and other unskilled migratory workers, at least to break the vicious circle that keeps their children out of school and condemns them in turn to an almost subhuman existence.

We need a Tribal employment program so that our aid to those we help educate will not end with a diploma, but continue until they are earning an honorable living in work worthy of a human being.

PAGE FOUR

While we work for progress, however, let us not forget the elderly people, our fathers and mothers and grandparents, the examples of their lives and the values they have bequeathed us. In their day, whoever heard of juvenile delinquency among the Navajos? My fathers and mothers, this administration will keep faith with you and your wise counsel will ever be remembered.

Many years ago, just following the second World War, the Krug Report stated the basis of the Navajo economic problem was that 75,000 people--it is nearer 100,000 now--were trying to eke out a living in an area with only enough resources to support 45,000. I reject such a short-sighted view. Switzerland, a land with even less resources, supports over four million people. Education and skill and hard work have accomplished this miracle. It cannot be done overnight, but it can be done--here.

As a start, I shall, in due course, lay before the Council a proposal for a thorough economic study of the Navajo Country, for such an exhaustive and imaginative study as has never before been undertaken here, of all factors, human and material, which can contribute to lasting productivity and employment of our people.

I shall propose a re-evaluation of our attitude toward private enterprise in developing manufacturing, extractive, and service industries on the Reservation. I propose that we tear down the walls of China that have kept private investment to a minimum in our Country. I propose that we establish a Navajo Chamber of Commerce, and that we actively seek adequate and convenient sources of credit for those who wish to start enterprises in the Navajo Country.

I propose that we encourage development even of our mineral resources in such ways as will give the greatest productive employment to our people. As long as I am Chairman, in each and every case where we have the alternative of digging up and exporting our resources, often with job-eliminating draglines as big as houses, or of fabricating them on the Reservation, I shall favor the course which gives the

greatest long-term Navajo employment, regardless of which may bring in the greatest royalties, rentals and bonuses to the Tribal treasury.

I shall seek the advice of the surrounding communities, and offer them our cooperation on job-giving projects to our common good.

I will propose the revision of Tribal leasing, licensing and credit regulations to give the greatest possible incentive to the establishment of small businesses by our Navajo people. In this connection I will propose an imaginative expansion of tourist and recreational facilities in our country.

I shall cooperate with the Federal Government in development of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project, and at the same time, work toward maximum agricultural development of other parts of our Reservation. I shall propose feasibility studies for deep-well irrigation to various areas of the Navajo Country.

I shall propose industrial and agricultural projects for the checkerboard area, and land acquisitions where possible on terms that are not wholly unreasonable.

And I will always hold out the hand of friendship, cooperation, honesty, and plain courtesy to the private investor who wishes to help himself by helping us.

I will spend less money in my administration on monuments and white elephants and more for the direct and lasting benefit of the Navajos in the hogans. I will trim exorbitant retainers and expense allowances to persons on contract with the Tribe and evaluate their services by the visible results, rather than their own self-serving boasts. I will seek advice from our non-Indian consultants, but not take orders from them, nor permit them to give orders to the personnel of my administration. I will engage economists to give economic advice, engineers to give engineering advice, and lawyers to give legal advice. For political advice I will go to the Navajo people.

I shall propose a greatly tightened administration of the fiscal affairs of the Tribe, with full controls. I shall, with the cooperation of the Council, seek to

eliminate expenditures that cannot be audited. I will root out wherever found any instances of kick-backs, graft, nepotism or conflicts of interest among the Tribal staff or consultants, and shall propose legislation to set up adequate criminal penalties for such misconduct.

I shall demand cooperation and mutual assistance among the heads of executive departments in my administration. I will treat my subordinates with honesty, loyalty and candor, and shall expect to earn the same qualities from them.

I have already engaged an organizational analyst to study the Executive Branch of the Navajo Tribe, and will transmit his recommendations to the Council in due course.

I shall propose supplemental and refresher courses for Tribal employees to increase their skills and general education.

And a word to my friends in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. You are my friends. The Navajo Tribe needs your help, and under my administration will welcome it. We will seek also the help of the Public Health Service, and other federal and state agencies. Your help and cooperation, I am convinced, are there for the asking.

Of course we may have our differences of opinion, but the chip is off my shoulder. We may make mistakes but our mistakes must never be mistakes which result from feintness of heart or abandonment of moral principles. It is the test of our courage, or our resolve, of our wisdom and of our essential decency. We know that it is your purpose that we shall not fail. The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. My administration does not regard it as any part of the functions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to act as a whipping boy for our own blunders.

To the States also I hold out the hand of friendship. Let us have no more jurisdictional quarrels. The boundary lines of jurisdiction are now well known. The problem is not to fortify frontiers, but to work together on the problems that affect us all. Our poverty cannot make you rich, our prosperity cannot make you

PAGE SEVEN

poor. Your misfortune will not help us. From this day out let it be said the Indian Wars are over, forever.

All of the program which I have outlined, the proposals that I will make specifically at a later date, and even the underlying ideal of them all, the development of the individual Navajo are, members of the Council, in your hands to advance or to hold back. Without you I can do very little. You will in my administration receive honest advice, and to the best of my ability true information on the issues before you. My administration will not make deals behind your back and rush your confirmation by one-sided presentations. It would be hypocritical indeed if the chief of an administration founded on the dignity of the individual did not respect the dignity of the delegates selected by the Navajo people to make their laws. I respect your dignity. I ask your help, Navajo Councilmen.

And I ask your help, your good wishes and your prayers, all of my Navajo people. Without you I would not be here now, without your confidence I will not remain. To all who made my election possible I express my undying gratitude. I ask your help, too, those of you who voted against me, and hope my administration may be such that it will yet win your good wishes.

To the Navajo women who supported me in my long crusade for Navajo democracy, I express my deep appreciation, and to my wife without whose help I could not have won.

I invite those nominal leaders who find that their conscience cannot be squared, with the groping and the failure of their party leader to join hands with us here and now.

Now as new workmen, we enter the great unfinished edifice of the Navajo Tribe. We must repair the damages we find, but the great task of building leaves no time for inquests over every crooked board. It is a better world we have to build, the one where every Navajo shall stand erect besides his fellow Americans as an equal among equals. Councilors and friends, the tools are ready and the task is tremendous LET US NOW GO TO WORK TOGETHER.