

Letters to the editor

Biking Gallup trails

To the Editor:  
I came to Gallup last month during spring break. Traveling with my wife and two kids, we came for a couple days just to ride the mountain bike trails. All those responsible have done an amazing job! We got the word from fellow bikers here in Colorado, so we detoured to Gallup en route to Arizona. Although we will be sending others to ride in Gallup we almost kept going when we could find no information and no bike shops? A guy named Todd Costley (the motorcycle racing screenprinter) finally got us all lined up with a hand drawn map and suggestions. He was very helpful, even making some phone calls to see if the local bike shop was still in business. Anyway, judging by our experience in Gallup, and excepting the annual core race crowd, very few of you appreciate the gem of a trail system you have, and how many families breeze through Gallup with bikes and miss Todd's hospitality. Do the math on how much we spent in food and hotels. Support your trail's group, put up some signs on the interstate, it's easy money for Gallup! Thanks again Todd. We'll be back.

Bill Donavan  
Salida, Colo.

Who speaks for the land?

To the Editor:  
This letter is in response to Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley's recent comments during his State of the Navajo Nation speech regarding the EPA's decision to review the environmental assessment for the proposed Desert Rock power plant.  
It is embarrassing that in one sentence he asked "How many of my people have to die before the U.S. government responds to help" and ends with "This is about sovereignty".  
Those people, both native and non-native who stand to profit from this project are so desperate that they can no longer form a coherent argument.  
Shirley goes on to say "I want to know that Navajos can live within

their reservation 20, 50, 100 years from now and Desert Rock is the key to ensure that happening". Has Shirley forgotten that Navajos have held on to their land and multiplied in spite of the poison being spewed from the two existing power plants in the area for hundreds of years?

Does Joe Shirley really believe that Desert Rock is going to end poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence, and gangs as he suggested? The answer to all these problems lies with adherence to the fundamental laws which teach respect for man and earth.

Shirley is trying to arrange a personal meeting with President Obama where he will go to Washington, hat in hand, with his tired old "little shoes on little feet" story. I will tell you now that not many little shoes will be bought with the money made by the few Navajo employees that the power plant would hire. I hope that President Obama has the wisdom to realize that Shirley does not represent the grass-roots Diné any more than George Bush represented Americans during the end of his term.

My extended family, whose land and lives are most affected by this project, and all those who will suffer ailments from the mercury, sulfur, and fly ash have been fighting against this project using their own funding and resources for over three years. We have no representation in tribal government above the chapter level as Shirley and his henchmen are unbending in their determination to ram this plant down our throats.

Who speaks for the unborn children who will inherit this decision, this abused land, the poisoned air, and the mercury laden fish? Not Joe Shirley. He speaks for the foreign corporation, Sithe Global that has come in to our country with this short sighted plan.

The Iroquois say "consider the impact of your decisions on the next seven generations." Listen to our Iroquois brothers, Mr. Shirley.

Thomas F. Johnston  
Red Mesa, Colo.

Power plant ailments

To the Editor:  
We see that President Shirley chose to cry about his power plant rather than take care of the Council raid on the reserves. The latest is about Shirley asking the regional director of the Environmental Protection Agency, "How many more people of mine are going to die before the U.S. Government responds to help?" We have the same question.

We have information, from the EPA and other sources, that Navajos living in the Shiprock area are many times more likely to need medical treatment for respiratory ailments caused by pollution from existing power plants. Given that prior administrations (including a Democrat one) refused to take positive action to deal with greenhouse gases, we do not know the extent to which gasses such as carbon dioxide from the existing power plants are harming Navajos. The overly-friendly environmental impact statement on Desert Rock from the URS Corporation said our breathing wouldn't be impacted by the proposed plant. The EPA said otherwise. That is a good reason to pull the air permit and take a fresh look at it.

Our recent communication to Regional Administrator Laura Yoshi noted the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals action in upholding existing limitations on emissions from the Four Corners plant and our letter asked that Dooda Desert Rock be at the table when future emission limits, including those on greenhouse gases, are set for that plant.

We also noted that the State of New Mexico took positive action to protect the health of Navajos by going after the San Juan Generating Station for air quality violations, and the State got a \$6.9 million fine settlement. Some of the money will go to improving environmental conditions in the area, including the Navajo Nation. Surely Mr. Shirley will also object to that intrusion on Navajo Nation sovereignty. The Nation can find resources to file friend of

the court briefs with the U.S. Supreme Court, but it doesn't seem to have time to support efforts such as going after area power plants for pollution.

How many more Navajos are going to be ill or die of respiratory ailments before President Shirley recognizes that another power plant will also kill?

Elouise Brown  
Chaco Rio, N.M.

Clean coal?

To the Editor:  
Last week, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., issued a press release titled "Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr. places Desert Rock project into international perspective during State of Nation address".

The press release was deceiving by not reflecting and addressing the health concerns related to pollutants emitted by power plants.

Shirley also stated that Desert Rock will create economic prosperity and is 10 times cleaner (environmental) than other projects. Also mentioned in the release was other countries are proposing to build over 800 coal-fired power plants to meet their rising demands and if we do not build one, the Navajo economic dependence and poverty will continue into the future.

First of all, you can not remove sulfur and mercury from coal and burn it free of emissions. "Clean Coal" is non-existent. If there was such a thing called "clean coal" (free of pollutants), we would be embracing Desert Rock happily.

Secondly, to state that if we do not build Desert Rock, the Navajo will continue into poverty is false.

Desert Rock Project has been allocated over \$15 million by the Navajo Nation. If the Navajo Nation invested the \$15 million into small local businesses such as grocery stores, auto shops, feed stores, restaurants, shopping centers, laundromats, hotels, farming, ranching, in partnerships with local vendors, we would have

created thousands of jobs, generated taxes and revenues that stay on the Navajo Nation.

If all the businesses mentioned above were built in Leupp, LeChee, Kaibeto, Tonalea, Navajo Mountain, Shonto, and Ganado. The local taxes generated would have then been funneled back to the chapters where it would be allocated for elderly housing assistance, scholarships, and help establish more businesses and partnerships with little impact to the environment.

Lastly, Mr. Shirley stated that he was concerned about New Mexico's 11th hour meetings with another agency without the President's office being consulted first. The feeling of being left out was greatly felt and voiced by the impacted residents of Black Mesa, Desert Rock, East Canyon Diablo (C-Aquifer) and Twin Arrows (Scotts). While the administration was meeting with Peabody, Sithe Global, Mohave Generating Station and the Gaming Commission, the families plead and cried over the harm that would continue on Black Mesa and Mother Earth, Desert Rock will emit pollutions causing health effects and Twin Arrows Casino will destroy, desecrate sacred ancient ruins/artifacts and create more social problems and poverty. Imagine the feelings the residents went through when they were brushed aside (left out)?

Our Navajo Economy will grow and stay healthy if we as a nation invest in renewable energy (wind/solar) and small local businesses, not Desert Rock or Twin Arrows Casino.

Calvin Johnson  
Leupp, Ariz.

P.S. This opinion expressed here is solely mine and not of Leupp Schools Inc., it's employees, staff and board.

Obama reaches out to Native Americans

By Jodi Gillette  
Associate Director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs

New era of responsibility: Expanding opportunities for Indian Country

On the campaign trail, President Barack Obama promised a renewed commitment to Indian Country by reaching out to tribes, listening to their concerns, and vowing to give Indians a seat at the table. Now, after years of being ignored and marginalized by politicians in Washington, we finally have a partner in the White House. We finally have that seat at the table.

As the associate director of Intergovernmental Affairs in the White House, and a proud member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, I know this administration is listening. In the first few months in office, the president has consulted with representatives of many constituency groups and made good on his promise to propose a budget with Indian Country in mind.

This budget cannot fix all of our country's problems overnight, but it is the first step towards improving the lives of Native Americans. It also proves that the issues most important to tribal nations will be addressed by Obama and his administration. The government-to-government relationship will be a full and equal partner-

ship.  
It begins with health care. Today, American Indians and Alaska Natives have a lower life expectancy and higher infant mortality rate than the average American because of poverty, discrimination and inadequate education. This puts extra strain on the Indian Health Service, which makes health care services available to 1.9 million Native Americans. Still, many Indians struggle to get access to health care.

That's why the president's plan includes a significant increase for the IHS. The president's plan directs hundreds of millions of dollars in new funding to the Indian Health Service — one of the largest increases in 20 years. With more than \$4 billion for this effort, the budget begins a multiyear investment to strengthen and expand services and prevention initiatives that will address persistent health disparities.

This commitment is on top of the IHS funding in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which provided \$500 million for health information technology, construction, equipment and improvements for hospitals and

health care clinics in Indian Country.

Obama's budget also focuses on strengthening Native communities through education and law enforcement — giving nations and families the tools they need to succeed. The president's budget includes \$161 million in increased funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and additional funding that will be available through the Departments of Justice and Education. All this will serve to strengthen tribal courts, detention centers and police programs to help Native Americans protect their own communities.

Specifically, the president's budget increases funding for BIA law enforcement by more than \$30 million and will strengthen police programs and detention centers to help Native Americans protect their communities. This funding will be used to hire and train

law enforcement and correctional officers to help fight violent crime and illegal drugs in Indian country. The budget also adds funds for Tribal courts, which play an important role in the exercise of Tribal sovereignty. These efforts build on the funding for BIA and the Department of Justice in the Recovery Act, which together provided over \$230 million for construction and improvements of Tribal detention centers.

To ensure that Indian students will be able to compete with young people across the country and around the world, the budget also provides \$50 million in funding earlier in the academic year for Tribal colleges. The budget also increases funding for scholarships and Tribal college operations by \$10 million. This plan will provide money earlier in the academic year, giving colleges greater financial security and ensuring that the next generation of tribal leaders receives the education they deserve while maintaining Indian culture and tradition. These efforts build on the more than \$275 million in Recovery Act funding that

will be used for construction and repairs at Bureau of Indian Education elementary and secondary schools.

Obama's budget looks out for Indian Country, and the Administration will continue to do so in the months and years to come. In addition to a tribal point of contact in the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, the White House will also be appointing an American Indian policy advisor to serve as a link between Indian nations and the president. After eight years struggling to be heard, this is only the beginning of the relationship between Washington and tribal leaders.

Obama is working hard to establish this relationship, and with the help of tribal leaders across the country, it will continue to be a meaningful one. This budget is one step in that process — a commitment to fund the programs that so many American Indians depend on. The president has shown his commitment to giving Indians a seat at the table, and those of us in his administration will fight tirelessly to advance the priorities of Indian Country going forward.

— Jodi Gillette is an Associate Director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and is a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.



Jodi Gillette

Letters to the Editor policy

GALLUP — The Independent encourages letters to the editor, which are published twice weekly — Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Letters must include writer's name, address and phone number although only the name and community of residence will be published.

Letters may not exceed 500 words. Letters may be edited for space and clarity. The Independent may choose not to print any letter for any reason.

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Letters may be mailed, delivered in person, faxed or e-mailed to: Editor, The Independent, P.O. Box 1210, Gallup, New Mexico 87305, (505) 722-5750 (fax); editorialgallup@yahoo.com (e-mail).

**Independent**  
LPS 010-605 1094 1099-8052

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Published daily except Sundays and New Years Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.  
By the Gallup Independent Co. at 500 N. 4th St., Gallup NM 87301. World Wide Web: <http://www.gallupindependent.com/>  
-gallupind/ E-mail: [gallupind@cia-p.com](mailto:gallupind@cia-p.com). Subscription rate: home delivery by carrier or motor route \$14.95 per month. Single copy 50¢ weekdays and \$1.00 weekends. By mail \$204.00 a year. \$102.00 for six months. \$17.00 a month 2-month minimum.  
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE INDEPENDENT, P.O. Box 1210, Gallup, NM 87305-1210.

This newspaper printed in part on recycled paper and is recyclable.

The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. — Isaiah 41:19