

Dine Policy Institute Brain Storming Session Notes-Navajo Nation Government Reform

The meeting was called to order at about 9:36 am by Robert Yazzie; he gave an “opening address,” acknowledged attendants, and did an opening prayer. Prayer and opening statements ended at about 9:46 am.

People who were present for the session:

Robert Yazzie-DPI Research Director
Richard Maxfield-BYU PhD, Volunteer consultant,
Lloyd Lee-Professor
Rahemi
Maroni Benally-DPI
Hamed
Herbert Benally-DC instructor
Donna House
Carol Goldberg
Andrew Curley-DPI Research Assistant
Nikke Alex-DPI Research Assistant
Bryan Neztosie-DPI Research Assistant
Jerry Spencer, Jr.-DPI DC student intern

(Yazzie) Gave a basic highlight of what the purpose is of the session. What is it that we’re after in seeking government reform? What is it that we want from government reform? What are the ideals of a government? What are the challenges? How do we implement a new government? All of this is for the review of the Navajo Nation council members.

(Benally) Added on Goldberg’s view on laws connection to natural... Went into cultural history of the Dine, which included the creation story, the fourth world, Changing Woman, Holy people and what they gave the Dine in terms of guidelines. Stated that the holy people gave the Dine a boundary in which they are to live in and also explained in short about the Hozhoji’ or Blessing Way ceremony and its purposes. He also went on to say that the Dine now days tend not to pay attention to old customary beliefs and practices like the Blessing Way. Noted that there are numerous tribal entities abroad and how there’s a number of “outside” people, African-Americans, other tribal people, who try to associate and claim to be Dine. He goes on to discuss that the Dine have a clan system and how the Dine use it to identify ourselves as Dine. However, he went on to say that those “outsiders” who are a part of the Dine society are difficult to be placed among the Dine. He went on to talk about SNBH and what it is or what it means to the Dine and how it is related to Dine government. He described the two halves of SNBH, the male and female halves of SNBH and how the government uses SNBH as a guideline to govern

the Dine. On the protection side of SNBH, male side, he went on to say that there were 12 chiefs who dealt with governing the Dine and how they oversaw or at least guided the Dine in dealing with community issues. There are also 12 chiefs, on the other half of the SNBH, who oversaw other matters that were important to the Dine, in a governing sense. He noted the similarities of the Crow people who have a prime chief with two consultants who advised the chief according to the times of the people.

(House) had a question, but made it difficult to ask.

(Benally) He agreed to House's question and point of view and elaborated on how the power of the people plays a significant role in tribal governing.

(Rahemi) Since the last century of the Dine, how much has changed or been modified to accommodate the changes of the times?

(Benally) Agrees that there has been a significant change in the assimilation and acculturation of the Dine and separated them into two different groups: the younger generation and the older generation. He explains that the younger generation is more accepting of newer ways of life and that there are few of them who are able to speak their language fluently. The older generation

(Rahemi) In terms of women's rights, how much influence and/or power do they have?

(Benally) He tells of how the woman was powerful back in the past. He explains that over time that power has sort of diminished or has grown weaker than it used to.

(House) Compares her history of being a woman and how she sought an education and in turn more power as a person, as a woman and as a Dine. She offered some insight of how different tribes see their women in terms of having authority or power in their communities. She feels that the Dine still have a very strong position on the power that the people have as a nation.

(Goldberg) She agreed that it is important that women are still important within tribal community.

(Benally) He went into a little more detail about SNBH, the male side and the female side, the protection side, and the blessing way side.

(Curley) Presented for about five minutes.

(House) Has the government been successful in serving and working for and with the Dine People?

(Maroni) That's a difficult question to answer, how do you define success? And successful in terms of what?

(Curley) Went into a brief history of how the Dine made it difficult to control and govern because of the vastness of the population and how the politics worked within the tribe at the time of conquest.

(Bryan & Nikke) Presented and added on Curley's presentation.

- The session went on to discuss current situations, expectations, workings and failures along with quick looks back to the past and its influence of current issues as well as how it all can benefit the Dine in the future. The discussion also included the current actions and inactiveness that the NN government has taken and how it doesn't seem to work for the people, but continues to promise assistance and service for the Dine. i.e.: the conference held in Hawaii was discussed because of how those who went were there to discuss and work for the Dine people, but didn't and only took it as an opportunity to vacation.

(Maxfield) Need to maintain order and bring about a sense of unity. The structure of government is supposed to set about a foundation that will lead to a future better for the people. The importance of the past plays a part in serving the present and preparing for the future. The Dine seems not to have a foundation in which a plan for the future is set or planned for. This may be because there aren't many positive connections that tie the Dine with the rest of the world and how they can use the influences of the outside world to benefit themselves in the future starting with how the government is working currently. He firmly believed that history and culture is beginning to play a lesser role in how the gov't is supposed to serve the people as well as how the influence of economy is making it even more difficult for the Dine to grow as a sovereign nation. There are almost no improving developments that have been made within the reservation that serves the people and does nothing to ensure that the future of the Dine will prosper or even improved. The Dine has a great supply of resources and do not use it properly enough to sustain and keep up with the growing demands of the people. This may be because the Dine has forgotten that their resources can be used and that they are supposed to be unified in order to prosper and grow as a sovereign nation.

(Lee) How do you change the mindset of the people and gear them towards a national means of prosperity and not a community means of benefiting the rest of the nation. He thinks that we need to focus on foundational laws of the Dine and what it means to live accordingly. What does it mean in today's ever-changing society? It needs to be reinstated and relearned in order for the Dine to begin a new way of governing themselves in a national means. If it is met and focused on more and implemented on a national level, then the local and community means of living and prospering will be met therein. The government should educate the citizens so as to give them a better understanding of how they need to change themselves either back to the foundational laws or to a newer means of governing that will benefit them in the long run.

(Rahemi) He addressed the issue of employment, economic and industrious growth. Urbanization was another issue that he felt was important to discuss and take under consideration as well as modernization and organization of the people. He goes on to tell of how his country (Afghanistan) also suffers from problems within these issues.

(Maroni) What is the purpose of government? He felt that it was important to define and answer this question and discuss the functions of government and what it's supposed to do for the people, its citizens. The broad purpose is to ensure Hozho', harmony with nature and the populace of the Dine, as well as Naayee'nitin, protection of the people.

(Hamed) From his own experience from his country, in his opinion, an integration of traditional values and evaluation of negative traditional values are important. This includes an evaluation of the current government, negative and positive points of the traditional values, and implementing an acceptable proposition that will turn the faults of the government into better solutions for the people and how the government is supposed to serve them.

(Benally) The barrier of language and communication between the older and younger generations, as a result of history's influence on the education given to the Dine during assimilation, makes it difficult for older and more traditional customs to be used and observed. Instead the Dine seems to do with this what they usually do when they see a rock in the middle of the road, they look for ways to go around it and avoid it. He believes that something needs to be done about relearning the traditional, cultural and "original" ways of understanding, dealing and accepting life as a Dine, the language needs to be relearned, the customs need to be taught again, and the outlooks on life need to be rekindled in order to bridge the gap between the old and the new generations so as to ensure that Dine will continue to be around and unique in the

future. And also to use as a guidance and foundation to build a better future upon in the governmental structure as well as the social structures in communities.

(House) She thanks the DPI staff for organizing and having the session because it is important not only to her but to all Dine. She expresses her thoughts and feelings about how government is important to the Dine as well as how we use it and sees, not only in literal terms but also how it is present in nature and other forms of life. She links all life together and sees them as citizens of some kind of natural government. She looks at gov't and sees what isn't working and notes that it is not working at the local, community levels where it is the citizens who are doing nothing to better their lives through government reform or whatever other means of prospering as a people. There is a big gap between education and prosperity that the Dine is seeking. She feels that unity between all aspects and forms of life are important and necessary for consideration in benefiting life as a whole.

(Goldberg) She offered some perspective and her point of view of how government is supposed to work for and serve the people. According to anglo-based views, government is supposed to start with the individual who vary and range from different cultural backgrounds and ethnic ties. Government is supposed to serve the individual and provide a harmonious state for the individual. The indigenous perspective of governments' purpose is supposed to serve the community. She sees that there are a lot of inter-dependencies in life (for example: social dependencies of people, natural dependencies and dependencies between man and nature) and there is a link between everything that needs to be observed, respected and managed so that everything may fall back into a harmonious state.

(Yazzie) The purpose of government is to show the connection to what makes sense with what it serves to how it serves, in his opinion. He observed other's points of views and he looks at the fundamental laws and how it ties everything together in what the purpose of government. He's observed traditional views, anglo views and governmental views of what gov't is supposed to do and how it's supposed to be. The Dine College board of regents needs to illustrate and be able to explain what they mean by SNBH and how it works for the Dine. They need to be able to make the connections between concept and views with purpose and how it works as well as make it clear what they mean by SNBH.

- There was a little discussion about “deconstruction” and how it takes different concepts and ideas from different origins and using the details to define and use as reference to support the ideas of the purposes of government. The ideas and notions of possible

government reform use these different concepts as reference and make them a part of the idea and reasons for the idea of reforming the government.

- The brain storming session left for lunch break and were on break as of 12:20 pm or so.
- The brain storming session reconvened from lunch break at about 1:44 pm.

(Maxfield) He feels strongly about education and emphasizes the importance of implementing courses on basic skills. He feels strongly about faster learning and more efficient learning skills, for example: implementing education and providing it on a wireless scale, internet, which will make getting an education affordable and very effective. His views on the importance of education are geared towards the economy and it's affect on tribal living in terms of politics and governing. He somehow moved all of his thoughts, arguments, and ideas towards the idea of government reform. He sees that the Dine have a singular political method of dealing with political matters and that is that the Dine has the Tribal Council who is basically in total control. Even if with the president they, the Council, confirm, reject, and operates the dealings that go on around the reservation, and the president can only do nothing but talk. This is a faulty area, from what I gathered from his "speech," and therefore is what needs to be reformed or gotten rid of. And because of this there may and probably will be a change in which decision making and law passing and reforming ideas will be taken under consideration where important choices will be made and acted upon in a timely and beneficial extent.

(Yazzie) Yazzie asked a couple of questions after Maxfield had given his view on his beliefs and they are as follow: Are there reasons for government reform? What are the reasons with government reform? This may have been asked by council members who probably believe that there's nothing wrong with the way in which the Tribal council acts and carries out their duties. It is possible that in their opinion there is no need for government reform; "if it's not broken, then don't fix it" kind of ideas.

(Maxfield) He believes that those in council will not so easily and willingly give up their powers because of the authority they are granted as councilmen and because they may only be serving their own better interests. Therefore, they will not openly accept new ideas and support the idea of reforming the form of government in which they had grown attached to that has given them authority over those who would oppose their ideas of government. He had also asked what kind of cooperation or role the judicial branch of the NN gov't would play just before Goldberg spoke up and asked a question.

(Yazzie) Just before Goldberg asked a question, Yazzie took time to answer Maxfields' question. His response was that there would be nothing done or no cooperation from the courts and judges who have political influences, being that he was a former judge and all. After Yazzie's answer, Goldberg asks her question.

(Goldberg) What is the history of the "fundamental laws" that were newly created and recently implemented within the Navajo Nation government?

(Maroni) There is little to nothing that has been recorded in determining when and how the fundamental laws were created. It may have been that medicine men and the speaker convened at one time and sort of thought out and agreed on what kind of guidelines a Dine or Navajo Nation citizen should follow and consider as "fundamental law."

(Maroni) Maroni goes to the white board and begins to write out some goals and ideas pertaining to what Goldberg, Maxfield, and Yazzie had just discussed. And they are:

Goals:

1. Government comporting with Fundamental Laws-policies/procedures/statutory law to comport with SNBH (hozho').
2. Government to effect positive action.
3. Balance between centralization and decent.
4. Revitalizing historical/cultural ways of thinking/language.
5. Proper relationships between Dine government and education.
6. F.L. method of leadership and decision-making.
7. Rethink and revisit F.L. to make it assessable and understanding.
8. Achieve strength in relations and dealings with outside governments and institutions.
9. Educational sovereignty.
10. "Social obligation" in processes of decision-making.

(These ideas and goals are listed during discussion and further discussed and amplified for clarification)

(Lee) He goes into the viewpoint of the people as a whole or at least in general and how they may accept, reject or how they may amend them and mold the ideas of government reform. He says that very few to no Dine conversation have included what the Dine want or how they see themselves years from now. He feels that if the Dine individual and families are targeted, and then change and acceptance will follow as a result of making change where change can be made. In short, he believes as Maxfield does about the importance of education but on a larger scale and with a more specific approach.

(Goldberg) She points out that many of the goals and ideas revolve around education and goes on to mention and suggest that there should be a strong or stronger bond between the tribal government and the education system in which necessary and important aspects are taught.

- The session took a short break at 2:45 pm and reconvened at about 2:55 pm.
- **Quick Break**
- After the break the gentlemen from Afghanistan took a moment to explain some of their countries tribal methods and dealings. This little presentation included a very brief history as it relates to their “jergas” and tribal dealings in politics and history (didn’t take notes during this, got lost).

(House and Goldberg) These two discussed and addressed the importance of language. They felt that it is important to understand and relearn native language so as to assist and support the idea of cultural identity. However, they felt that it should be integrated into school curriculums so as to encourage and sort of reinstate the notion of cultural “nationalism,” and not only there but also within the homes. They further discussed with the rest of the session members why it is not a part of the school curriculums and is widely taught or even encouraged. They discussed this at a family level, a grade school level as well as post high school level (college/university).

- During this time (from about 3:15-3:45) the session has turned its attention towards a very educational based belief system where ideas and questions about traditional education and language education can be implemented and why it’s not implemented, but the list continued to include other goals.

What do you think the ideal government system would be? And how do we implement them?

(Yazzie) What makes sense here is that there are enough things that are there for the people to work with and we just need to identify them and mold them into a better method and/or improve them so that they better serve the people in the form of government. He felt that #1 on the goals list is what should be a basic outline and method of reforming government and improving it. However, what needs to be gotten rid of or changed completely should be erased or changed so that the better outcome is attained and change is apparent through government. He feels that we can arrive at a better government working system if we can implement and use the narrowed down meaning of SNBH, what SNBH means and how it can work in a government structured

system. Consensus, trust relationships, integrity, respect and K'é should be observed, practiced, and instilled into governmental dealings and involvements.