

## **Executive Order 13781- Proposed Reorganization of the Executive Branch**

### **Ramah Navajo Chapter-Ramah Band of Navajos**

**Presentation by David Jose, President**

To understand the concerns of the Ramah Navajo people, it is important to first understand our history. Ramah Navajo Chapter has approximately 3,500 members and is located in northwestern New Mexico, east of Zuni Pueblo and about 100 miles from the main Navajo Nation reservation. The Ramah Band of Navajo Indians established this area as our homeland hundreds of years ago.

The Ramah Band has been recognized as a part of the Navajo Nation since the BIA first dealt with Navajos. The Ramah Band Navajos, along with other Navajos, were rounded up, and force-marched across New Mexico and incarcerated at Bosque Redondo in the 1860s. The treaty that followed that incarceration and established the main Navajo reservation, however, tragically did not include the Ramah Band's homeland in its description of Navajo reservation land.

Nevertheless, we returned to our homeland and established a life there as ranchers and farmers. However, armed Mormon settlers eventually arrived and pushed us off the best farming and ranching lands. These and other Anglo settlers have continued to push for our extinction as a community, going so far as to lobby Congress for our forceful removal. Nevertheless, we have survived; and over time, we have acquired title to some of our original homelands and maintain a community there today.

Due to our remote location and great distance from the main Navajo Nation, we were neglected for many years. We had dirt trails for roads, very poor educational opportunities, substandard housing, no healthcare facilities, and 99% unemployment.

In 1972, however, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established an independent Ramah Navajo Agency and placed that Agency not within the Navajo regional office, but within the regional office—now known as the Southwest Regional Office---serving other tribal communities in our area.

Ever since the Ramah Agency was established, the Ramah Navajos have worked with federal representatives in the Southwest Regional Office on a government-to-government basis. Our community credits this unique relationship with its survival as a distinct community, separate from the main Navajo reservation.

Since 1986, the Ramah Chapter and the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc. have contracted directly with the federal government, through the Southwest Regional Office, to provide programs to the community. This long and steady relationship has been endorsed and supported by the Navajo Nation and has established the Ramah Navajo Chapter's unique status as an independently governed community. Indeed, in 1991, the Albuquerque Area Director,

Sidney Mills, sent a letter to the BIA Central Office stating that the Ramah Band of Navajo Indians was considered a quasi tribe.

In submitting these comments here today, we want to ensure that any reorganization does not threaten Ramah Navajo Band's status as an independent community or negatively impact its established relationships with the Southwest Regional Office and other tribal communities and partners within the area.

### **Executive Order 13781**

On March 13, 2017, President Trump issued an executive order directing agency heads, after opportunity for public notice and comment, to submit to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (the "Director") a proposed plan to reorganize the agency, if appropriate, in order to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. Specifically, agency heads are directed to propose a plan to reorganize governmental functions and eliminate unnecessary agencies, components of agencies, and agency programs. The Ramah Navajo Chapter submits the following comments for consideration in developing such a proposal for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

**The Ramah Navajo Chapter vehemently opposes any plan that would eliminate or reduce funding for the Ramah Navajo Agency, consolidate the Ramah Navajo Agency with any other local agency, or that would move the Ramah Navajo Agency from the oversight of the BIA's Southwest Regional Office.**

1. **Late Notice:** The Ramah Navajo Chapter did not receive the Dear Tribal Leaders letter requesting input on this matter until, June 9, 2017, when most of the listening sessions had already occurred.
2. **History of Drastic Cuts:** The Ramah Navajo Chapter is deeply concerned about the potential effect of reorganization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The 2013 restructure of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to achieve "administrative cost saving," caused great damage to the Ramah Navajo Chapter:
  - First, the Ramah Navajo Agency suffered deep funding cuts, especially when compared to other agencies within the Southwest Region. The Ramah Navajo Agency is now operating on approximately 40% of its pre-2013 funding levels. This is not enough to operate the agency and further cuts would require closure.
  - Second, the local BIA Road Maintenance was transferred to another area office, which caused significant delay in provision of road maintenance services to our remote community. On account of high elevations and severe weather conditions, it is essential that the Chapter retains a local road maintenance program to provide access to the scattered and rural residences

through the community for purposes of health, social and community services and to provide open and safe roads for school buses. The Chapter had to enter into its own 638 Contract to directly perform such services to ensure year round road access and maintenance for our community members. This contract, like the Chapter's other contracts, is already woefully underfunded.

- Ramah Navajo Chapter's strong opposition to these actions was not accorded due consideration in making the final determinations.

**3. Need to Maintain Separate Ramah Agency:** As it did in 2013, the Ramah Navajo Chapter once again opposes any restricting that will move, consolidate, eliminate, or reduce funding to the Ramah Navajo Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The BIA Ramah Navajo Agency staff may be small, but the work is tremendous.

- The Ramah Agency oversees, monitors, and has signature authority for all P.L. 93-638 contracts with the Ramah Chapter and Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.
- Ramah Navajo Chapter has 3 mature contracts and 7 project specific contracts with the Bureau consisting of 15 programs with a total of 56 regular full time employees and 28 temporary employees. Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc. has 2 mature contracts consisting of several programs with 226 regular full time employees and 24 temporary employees. Both entities together have 334 FTE.
- The programs provided under these contracts are entirely separate from the Navajo Nation programs.
- Ramah Chapter is remote and is geographically separate from the primary Navajo Nation and for this reason, among others, the Ramah people have different needs than those residing on the Navajo Nation's primary reservation.
- Consolidation or elimination of the BIA Ramah Navajo Agency will seriously damage our ability to survive as a viable Navajo community. Losing our own agency will mean submersion in an indifferent sea of bureaucratic streamlining that will erode Ramah Navajo Chapter's independent relationship with the Federal Government.
- For these reasons, the Ramah Navajo Chapter needs a separate and independent agency to address its needs.

**4. Need to Maintain Placement Within Southwest Region:** Ramah Navajo Chapter opposes any proposal that will move the Ramah Agency from the Southwest Region to the Navajo Region.

- As recognized for many years and as confirmed by the historical and current organizational structure, Ramah Chapter is geographically closer to, and its

interests are more aligned with other tribal entities in the Southwest Region, than the Navajo Nation as a whole.

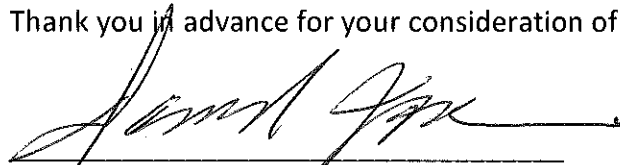
- Ramah has established relationships, partnerships, and contracts with the BIA Southwest Regional office and other tribal entities within that region.
- Ramah Navajo wants to continue its established relationship with the BIA Southwest Regional Office. In the Southwest Region, the Ramah Navajo Band has established government-to-government relationships with a strong voice. The Ramah Band's identity and survival as a distinct community hinges on retaining this vital connection.

**5. Need to Maintain Distinct Community:** While the Ramah Navajos are true Navajos and always will be, we live under unique historical and geographic circumstances. The present relationships with Interior and IHS foster our survival as distinct community, with its own traditions, bonds, and history. Therefore, Ramah Navajo Chapter continues to stand by its initial stated position to maintain the BIA Ramah Navajo Agency in its established present location within the Ramah Navajo Community, and within the BIA's Southwest Region.

**6. Consistency of Ramah's Positions with Goals of Efficiency, Effectiveness and Accountability:** Most of the direct service to tribes and tribal members occurs at the agency level. Because the local agency has direct contact and relationships with community members, it can more efficiently and effectively serve their needs, when compared to a central or regional office. The central and regional offices do more bureaucratic and administrative work that in our experience, can take weeks or months to complete. Accordingly, maintaining local agencies is essential to meeting the goals of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability as set forth in the executive order.

**Again, the Ramah Navajo Chapter vehemently opposes any plan that would eliminate or reduce funding for the Ramah Navajo Agency, consolidate the Ramah Navajo Agency with any other local agency, or that would move the Ramah Navajo Agency from the BIA's Southwest Region.**

Thank you in advance for your consideration of Ramah Navajo Chapter's important concerns.



David Jose, Ramah Navajo Chapter President