



## THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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# Navajo Nation communications director calls on newspaper to report, opine accurately, completely, fairly about conference

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – On Tuesday, Navajo Nation Communications Director George Hardeen issued this as a letter to the editor of the Farmington Daily-Times. We appreciate the opportunity to respond to its Nov. 11 story and editorial column.

With finger of blame pointed directly at the Navajo Nation and its leaders for the third time in a week, the Farmington Daily-Times delivers acrimony and assumption to its readers rather than facts and details.

Despite two weeks of “investigating,” and already proclaiming that a federal investigation is warranted, the newspaper reports with certainty that “answers remain elusive,” “identities remain unknown,” participants “may have paid their own way,” and information “could not be confirmed.”

One’s left to wonder what “claiming ties to the Navajo Nation” really means.

Yet, regardless of the paucity of its investigation’s findings, its editorial voice blusters with a wind that fans a fire of emotion the newspaper itself lit.

Without a thought, editor Troy Turner casually dismisses a point-by-point deconstruction of the poorly-crafted news story that launched this imbroglio. In doing so, he shows readers not to expect the Daily-Times to take criticism, only dispense it. Meanwhile, he accuses Navajo officials of a deficiency of communication, accountability and ethics, professional standards that the Daily-Times proves itself wanting of in its coverage of this story.

Here’s why Mr. Turner and the Daily-Times are wrong:

*“The editor casually dismisses a point-by-point deconstruction of the poorly-crafted news story. In doing so, he shows readers not to expect the Daily-Times to take criticism, only dispense it.”*

– Navajo Nation Communications Director George Hardeen

- Despite its claim to have sent 55 Freedom of Information Act requests to schools, the newspaper has yet to report a confirmed number of Navajos who attended the Hawaii conference, what organizations they represented, report any interviews with federal officials, or cite any document to support its alarming assertion of widespread wrongdoing. Instead, it substitutes lots of opinion for fact, in both its news columns and on its editorial page.

Whose duty is it, if not a newspaper’s, to gather and then check and double-check information before publication? How else does a newspaper ensure accuracy, the mother’s milk of journalism? Only through diligent confirmation and verification does a newspaper earn and maintain its credibility with readers, especially with a story that alleges misuse of funds or illegal activity.

The Daily-Times has not done this. If it had, there would be no question a week later about how many Navajos attended the conference, at what cost, or who paid for them.

The Navajo Nation government did not send the majority of participants, despite the newspaper reporting that it did without correction. So what obligation does the Navajo Nation now have to call every school district in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah to find out how many participants they might have sent?

None. That's the newspaper's job, and the Daily-Times hasn't done it.

- From the start, the Daily-Times' stories have been based on speculation that has not been independently corroborated or verified. Nonetheless, Mr. Turner asserts that the Navajo Nation should be ashamed, said high Navajo attendance at the Hawaii conference should be considered a "crime," and pronounced the Nation guilty of enough waste to require a federal investigation. With such generalities, one wonders who would be prosecuted.

In calling for such an investigation, Mr. Turner turns to someone else to do his newspaper's legwork to get to the bottom of what it apparently can't quite figure out.

How, then, is the Daily-Times accountable to readers when it cannot report the very information it says justifies a federal investigation?

How is it accountable when it holds the Navajo Nation responsible for the free, independent and legal actions of its citizens who are not its employees?

- The portrayal of the National Indian Education Association conference by the Daily-Times is that it was a waste of time and money, and that attendance was for frivolous reasons only. In fact, Mr. Turner writes that thousands were spent to "wine and dine as many as 400 Navajo representatives" even though the newspaper has not published a single statement from anyone who said they enjoyed wine while dining.

Doesn't such a representation tend to defame and ridicule Navajo officials, educators and citizens when not even the Daily-Times has reported whether it's remotely true or not?

- Mr. Turner states there has been a lack of cooperation from the President's office although he and other reporters in his newsroom are fully aware that I spoke to reporter Cory Frolik four times over three days prior to publication of his first story.

Mr. Turner sarcastically and disparagingly writes that President Shirley is "rumored to still hold office but has refused interviews to prove it," although his reporter has not once attempted to reach him or me since his first story was published. Still, Mr. Turner has no hesitation to try to turn public opinion against the President.

Meanwhile, when traveling to Washington, D.C., last week, the President was interviewed by KNDN-Farmington, the AP Albuquerque bureau, and the Los Angeles Times. The President makes himself available to local, regional and national reporters regularly, as a Google search would show. He speaks to the Navajo public on the radio every week, and makes public appearances every week both on and off Navajoland.

The Daily-Times once published verbatim Q & A interviews with President Shirley each quarter until Mr. Turner signed on as editor and the practice was dropped. For Mr. Turner to now accuse the President of being inaccessible is preposterous when his own reporters let weeks and weeks go by without a phone inquiry to his office.

- In every case and in every story, it is a professional journalist's job to separate fact from rumor by confirming information. If it checks out, report it. If it doesn't, then, obviously, don't. Yet the Daily-Times has failed to do that with this story.

With uncertain figures based on incomplete information, it rushed to judgment, and now unfairly faults Navajo Nation leaders as unaccountable, unethical and unresponsive without having spoken to anyone but the man on the street.

The Daily-Times should figure out what its story is. It should figure out who its news sources are. And then it should report professionally and responsibly to its readers.

At the same time, its editor should stop taking wild swings at Navajo leaders and educators, and provide his newsroom and community with the leadership he was hired to provide rather than the rancor he's broadcasting now.

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The Navajo Nation