

NOTES OF AN ADDRESS MADE BY H. J. HAGERMAN, COMMISSIONER TO
THE NAVAJO TRIBE, AT THE OPENING OF THE TRIBAL
COUNCIL AT TOADLENA, NEW MEXICO, JULY 7, 1923.

You have been elected by the Indians of the various jurisdictions within the Navajo country to this Council, to speak in behalf of the tribe and to act for the tribe in regard to its tribal affairs. At the preliminary meetings where you were present, I fully explained the circumstances which made it necessary to elect this Council, and it is unnecessary for me to say again what I then said. I have no doubt but that you have talked these matters over amongst yourselves and have come to your own conclusions as to what you want to do. There is no disposition on my part to try to make you do anything except what you determine is for your own best interests. As representatives for the whole tribe, speaking for the thirty thousand Indians in this reservation, you have a serious duty to perform, and if for any reason you fail in that duty, if you fail to act for the best interests of your people, you will by them be charged with a great fault for not doing so.

You, therefore, should think and consider carefully on what I am going to say to you.

I was asked by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, with the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, and with the approval of the President, to undertake the task of forming this Council, and of assisting you in bringing about the de-

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velopment of the oil resources in this reservation, and to take general supervision over the tribal affairs of the Navajo nation. It was not a task which I sought and it has not been an easy task, by any means.

We should all remember at this time that the one thing the Navajos most need is help to develop the resources in the reservation so that the coal and oil, if it is here, will produce money for you to improve your condition. To get this help, you must help me--you must help the Government. You must forget your own differences, if you have any, you must all work together to win for yourselves the victory for right and justice you are entitled to.

I have already learned to like the Navajos greatly, and I propose to stay with you and do my best to help you just as long as I can, for I know you need help in the situation which is now before you. This situation is perhaps the most important situation in the history of your race, the most critical and important crisis in your whole history.

As I have said to you before, this is your situation:

You are a strong and virile race.

In 1868 there were about six thousand Navajos; now there are about thirty two thousand.

Your number is still increasing.

You are a self-supporting people. You do not live on charity, but mainly from your own work and effort.

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This Navajo Reservation has been set aside for you exclusive use. It is much larger than it was back in 1868, in the days your people came back from Fort Sumner. Then you had a tract of land, land assigned to your use in the Treaty of 1868, ninety miles north and south and sixty miles east and west. Now you have an area about one hundred miles north and south by two hundred miles east and west. Now you actually have about four times as much land as you had then. But now you have five times as many people as you had then. Remember that: Five times the people and four times the land, and your people still increasing.

But remember this. How do you support yourselves? With your flocks; very largely with your flocks of sheep, with your wool and your mutton, and your blankets made from your wool. And you grow your sheep with a grass growing wild over this great country. Well, and how is this grass now, compared with what it was fifty years ago, or twenty five years ago, and even ten years ago? Those of you who are old men know of your own knowledge that the grass is no where near so good as it was. You who are young men know the same thing. We all know that the range is not one half as good as it was twenty five years ago; it is not one third as good as it was fifty years ago.

This is your whole problem. You can not continue to make a fair living on this reservation of yours, with your people growing up in numbers and with your range growing down in its capacity to carry your sheep, unless, first, you improve your range, second, unless, you improve your sheep, third, unless you get more land, and fourth, unless you do something else to improve your condition and increase your wealth.

This is the heart of the whole matter.

This is the problem which confronts you.

The Government is doing a very great deal to help you solve this problem, to help you answer this great question, and you must now do a great deal to help yourselves. The Government is giving you schools, educating your children in the way the white man's children are being educated; the Government is helping you improve your stock, and helping you to farm. There has been great improvement in your sheep and your wool. A great deal has been done in Farming, but all that is not enough. Something more must be found for you and you must help us find it, for after all the range is getting worse and probably no more lands can be added to your reservation. It will be very difficult to get more land to add to your reservation.

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Now, there is a good chance of finding something more for you, if you will co-operate with the Government. Here, in this Treaty reservation of yours, on this Treaty land, this piece of land ninety miles long and sixty miles wide, there is coal, and perhaps there is oil. We do not really know yet whether there is oil. If this land had been public land, not Indian land, it would long ago have been worked for coal and oil, but it is difficult to work it when it is Indian land, because it is necessary for the Government and the Indians to agree about how it shall be worked. If the Indians can not agree with the Government how to work it, then the Indians will suffer for the failure to agree, more than any one else can possibly suffer.

The laws of the United States provide that leases to dig for oil may be granted on Indian land if the Secretary of the Interior and the Council speaking for the Indians agree, and if the agent in charge of the reservation agrees on a plan. I am now that agent. You are the Council. The Department of the Interior, headed by the Secretary of the Interior, is in Washington. I am between you and the Government in Washington--the link of the chain which connects you with the Government. That is the situation.

Now, after being out here with you for some time, I went to Washington and we discussed a plan to bring about

this development. We discussed it over and over again, with the Secretary of the Interior, with the Commissioner, and with others high in authority, and this is the plan they arrived at.

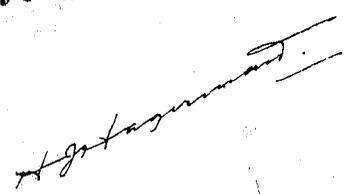
(Then discuss fully the regulations of April 24.)

It is the very best plan which these high officials in Washington could, under the law, arrive at. I am charged with the presenting of this plan to you, and Washington wants you to consent to this plan. Unless you consent to this plan, unless you give your consent to this plan, the opening up of the oil fields, if there is one here, may be long delayed. If you do consent to it, the Government can go ahead and secure some initial leases and then go ahead under the plan and sell leases, and the money received at these sales, and the royalties from the oil, if oil is discovered, will begin to come into the tribal funds for the benefit of the tribe. It is for you to say whether or not this plan shall be carried out.

There was prepared in Washington before I left there, by the officers of the Interior Department, a resolution which I was asked to present to you for you to pass, in order to give your assent to this plan. I am going to give this resolution to you so that you may consider it, when you have elected your chairman and Vice-Chairman.

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Again I say, it is not my desire, it is not the desire of the Government, to ask you to do anything you do not want to do, nor in any way to prevent your discussion of any matters which you want to discuss. But I am charged with the duty of telling you what the Government will do, and the Secretary of the Interior asks you to trust me to act in your behalf. If you feel like trusting me, I will do my very best to serve you. That is all I can say.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "H. G. ...", is written over a horizontal line.