



**STATEMENT FROM GOVERNOR VAL R. PANTEAH  
ON THE RECENT PASSAGE OF FORT WINGATE LAND TRANSFER BILL**

On behalf of the Zuni Tribe, I am very pleased to announce that on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, the President signed into law, S. 2943, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017. This bill, among other things, authorizes appropriations to keep our Department of Defense and certain Department of Energy programs, running. It also contains legislation that is of major significance to the Zuni Tribe and Navajo Nation. Specifically, Section 2829F of the Act contains legislation captioned “Return of Certain Lands at Fort Wingate, New Mexico, to the Original Inhabitants” (the “Bill”).

The Bill is the culmination of more than two decades of efforts to secure the return of substantial areas of the former Fort Wingate to the Zuni and Navajo Nation tribes. The negotiations between the two tribes on an appropriate division of the Fort Wingate lands were protracted and often challenging. However, in June of 2013, with critical assistance from Congressmen Pearce and Lujan, as well as House Subcommittee Chairman Don Young, leaders from Zuni and Navajo agreed upon a division of the Fort Wingate lands that is reflected on an April 2016 “Negotiated Property Division” map (the “Map”), which the Bill references. Although the Army subsequently insisted on retaining approximately 6,459 acres of additional lands that had been slated for transfer to the tribes, these retained lands will be transferred to the Interior Department, and then to the appropriate tribe (in accordance with the Map), when the Secretary of Defense determines that they are no longer required for military purposes.

The legislation also recognizes and preserves for a term of 40 years existing utility rights-of-way. This was a difficult, but not unreasonable compromise of this thorny property rights issue.

In short, neither tribe got everything it wanted in the legislation, but arguments on how the Fort Wingate lands should be divided had gone on for too long and were the source of unnecessary

tensions and frustrations. It is now time to put past differences behind us and to work cooperatively to develop appropriate areas of the former Army depot, and to protect other areas that contain cultural resources. We sincerely thank our New Mexico Congressional delegation, and Congressman Pearce in particular, for both their hard work and their patience, and we look forward to working with the Departments of Defense and the Interior to accomplish the land transfers authorized by the legislation as expeditiously as possible.