

Arizona State University - Zah Peterson - 2008-12-17

PZ: [0:02] We're on.

PI: [0:04] We're on. We wanted to talk a little bit this morning about leadership and about changing times. I'm always impressed when I go back through the Navajo documents at how many people were speaking out and trying to do their best to make sure the land didn't get taken. And forging a future, you might say, for... for the next generation. When I think about it, the meaning of leadership, of course, is different from one time to another. And over the course of your life, you've seen a variety of leaders, some of them very effective. But it was an enormous challenge to fight off the various dangers to people's water and people's lands and people's lives. I wonder, when you were... you know, when you came back to Navajo country, you had an opportunity to begin to think about that, in a sense, and to see these different patterns of leadership emerge. The DNA was obviously an important agency, and it was in its own way a political agency, too, taking on various cases, various issues, various problems. I had just come to the Navajo and, you know, was just getting started. And you and Ted Mitchell went out and recruited some people. And there was work to do.

When you think about the patterns or the leadership or

the leaders -- the people who are leaders today, what are some of the important qualities or attributes that a leader in Navajo country would have had to have had or would be today.

PZ: [2:00] My own perspective on the issue of leadership is that every generation -- [cell phone ringing] -- have their own leaders. [ringing] They did whatever it is that they think should be done. And while doing that throughout Navajo history, they did a wonderful thing for the Navajo people. And so these qualities or attributes of leaders really comes in with time, because every one of us -- every one of us, we have our own leadership qualities, abilities, and what have you. And it was one of those situations in the life of (we as a?) [cell phone ringing] Navajo people that what they did was significant. [3:00] And it was extraordinary. And in terms of the qualities, I would say for Navajo leaders, one of those important attributes is the individual has to know the Navajo culture. They have to know the Navajo clan system -- how people are all related to each other. And there are things that comes with those relationship. Every Navajo family has, for example, in-laws. They are married into another family. And if you know the clan system very, very well, then there are things like the (teasing?) of Navajo individuals comes

into use by Navajo who is very well-versed in clan relations. And that's -- that's just to keep the -- whatever the issues at hand going. And, yeah, the Navajo people will -- during the election, they will fight. But they always come back together after the election. And that's one thing that one has to admire the Navajo people about. So the relationship between all of these families -- the knowledge on the Navajo culture, the knowledge on clan relationships, for me, was very, very important.

The second one is one of the qualities that the individual has to have is a dream. You can't just look at yourself as the administrator of the largest Indian tribe in the United States. But to be able to have a vision, to be able to have some degree of knowledge about how to get to that vision that you're looking at and distance away -- years away into the future. How do you organize so that you get the Navajo Nation to get to be at the certain point at a certain time in their history? So a visionary leader, someone who has a vision, is very, very important.

And I guess the other thing is that you have to have an ability -- not only in the Navajo language, the Navajo culture, but in terms of the ability to speak English very well, and then be able to articulate those dreams. For me, it was very, very important. [6:00] And I think that

sometimes, a quality that a lot of people overlook -- everybody has an idea. Everybody thinks about what is it that they want to do? But you can't get lost --

PI: [06:15] Right.

PZ: [06:16] -- in explaining what those visions are. You've got to be able to articulate it so that you connect with people, and you know what people are thinking. And so an articulation of those dreams... your vision... I think is very important.

I always say, also, that a leader has to know that when he gets to a corner, he has the ability -- he should have the ability to anticipate what's around the corner on the other side, without actually looking at it. He has to be able to see the situation as they really are. And that anticipation of what may be coming, I think, is very important also, because when you have these kinds of leadership, then you're prepared for anything that may come your way. So the ability to get around your corner and then look on the other side of the building, I think, is very, very important for an effective leadership. So I just wanted to say some things about the qualities that I think Navajo people are able to look at.

And the last one, I think, is very important. Navajo is going through an evolution. Being a traditional person,

and then going from that kind of living -- going from that history of the Navajo people over to the moderate way of life over on the reservation. And I think an individual has to have those experience that traditional people have -- for example, herding the sheep, tending to the horses, planting your own corn, raising your own food. And... and then being able to live on the Hogan, and knowing the Navajo prayers -- all of those kinds of traditional behavior patterns that Navajo people have -- one has to really be able to understand that. And you can only learn that -- those aren't taught in schools.

PI: [8:55] Right.

PZ: [8:57] You can only learn from your parents and grandparents [9:00] and people in the community -- all those kinds of attributes. And you have to be able to measure your own ability against some of your own, for example, uncles' and aunts' and grandpas' that live in those communities. And so it's important that a person who wants to be a leader go through all of that process. And it's something that I thought was -- was important in much of what people did during the -- for example, the 1950s and '60s and '70s.

And the other thing that I think is very important is that a person also has to have some kind of an experience

where they go through hardship themselves. And that they know how to react to those trying times. You don't -- one doesn't really know the quality of a leader until there's a problem -- a huge problem -- a controversy.

PI: [10:15] Yes, yes.

PZ: An emergency. To see how that individual behaves. And if there's some kind of a tragedy, some really -- an event that really affects so many people -- then you really find who the leaders are. Because you can't just go in front of the people and say, "You know, I'm going to be your next leader." They have to see that.

PI: [10:45] Yes.

PZ: [10:46] And so I think those kinds of experiences are of necessity.

I also would like to add one other thing on this question and issue, and that is this. I admire the Navajo people in the past. And I'll give you and cite some examples. If you look at the time that the Navajo people were imprisoned in Fort Sumner, at Hweeldi, and we stayed there for four years. And there were many, many Navajo people that were imprisoned there by the United States government at the time. And the Navajo people that -- the Navajo leaders that were there, they were actually medicine men. Chief Manuelito is a good example -- Ganado Mucho is

a good example. And some of the very well-known Navajo people that were imprisoned there. And they survived because they knew the Navajo religion. [12:03] They knew the Navajo ways of life. They know that -- they knew that you had to depend on yourself to be self-sufficient. And the United States government thought that they might all die there. But they survived. They survived. So they must have had something, for them to do that and to go through all of that ordeal.

And they came back in eighteen... I believe it was in 1868, '69. During that period they came back to the Navajo. But when they were in the process of being released from Fort Sumner, the leaders did not fight. They wanted to get back to their land; they wanted to get back to their people. They were homesick for their, you know, for their relatives and for their homeland. So they didn't fight over a little small detail while they were signing their treaty. They just said that, look, this gives us an opportunity --

PI: [13:05] -- it's a start, yeah.

PZ: [13:05] -- to get back to our original land. And so they did. And when they got to what was now the Navajo Nation, it was just a small piece of elongated land that went from, let's say, somewhere south of Window Rock, Arizona, going

all the way up north along the state line and into Shiprock. And it was no more than maybe one million acres of land. Small piece of land that they accepted. They didn't fight over, or they didn't really resist the fact with the federal government while in the process of negotiation. They didn't fight over the small piece of land that they were being asked to go back to. Because I think they themselves agreed amongst themselves that they would go back to the Navajo. And when they do that, they have a tremendous amount of work ahead of them, which was to increase the acreage that they -- the individual land that they went back to. It wasn't anywhere near what they were looking for --

PI: [14:31] Sure.

PZ: [14:32] -- but they didn't make a big fuss about that.

They just went back, and then they all went to work. Each one of these chiefs, leaders, they all went back to work, and they start adding to their reservation. Every so often -- maybe every ten years, every five years, they would -- for some reason, they would keep on adding to the Navajo Nation. So from 1868, when they went back to that one million acre of land [15:00], to two thousand... oh-oh-eight, they now have seventeen million acres of land. So you go from one million acre of land to seventeen -- about

seventeen million acres of land. That's a huge, huge addiction.

PI: [15:20] Yes, it is.

PZ: [15:24] But how did that happen? Why did it happen? I always say it happened because of Navajo leadership.

PI: [15:32] I think you're right.

PZ: [15:34] For that long period of time -- for that long period of time, over a hundred years, each one of those leaders that came out of the Navajo generation, they had the same goal. That what they wanted to do was -- Navajo population is increasing. We're getting more and more young people into the tribe each year. Therefore, the land has to grow as the population of the Navajo people is also growing. And none of those leaders ever said "We shouldn't be doing that. We should be happy with the amount of acres that we have." They all spent resources. They all did exactly the same thing from one generation to the other, which was to add more land to the Navajo Nation.

I like the leadership of Chief Manuelito, because he knew -- he knew that that was happening. He also said, "What we now need is education." So at a time when the idea of sending Navajo youngsters to receive their education was a bad thing among the Navajo people, he chose the route of sending our Navajo youngsters to colleges and

universities. To boarding school. He said that they had to learn how to speak English. They had to learn the white man's ways. If we can send our children to school, have them learn the white man's ways, then we can use the education -- the education system as a way to win our battles. And so he didn't shy away from a controversy where the majority of the Navajo people at the time did not want to send their children to school. He made sure that the Navajo children and the Navajo families gave up their children to go to school. Because he knew that it was something that had to be done, because we were adding land to the Navajo people -- to the Navajo land right and left, you know, every four or five years. And the Navajo population was increasing. And he said that we can't really just stay that way. [18:00] We've got to send these people off to school. Let them become doctors. Let them become engineers. Let them become nurses. Let them become lawyers. And if we can do that, we can do the same thing to fight our battles, and these young people will fight our battles for us and will win in many of those situations and will win by educating our youngsters. And he said that the only way you could do it is to learn more about the ways of the white man. And after we -- our kids learn all about that, you know, then they can fight the battles

effectively. Because at that point, it would be almost a lot like them.

So I think that's such an admirable -- and admirable... I really admire the way the Navajo leadership progressed in that fashion. Putting all of the land expansion together with education. And so when something like that happens, you can't help but be positive for the future of the Navajo Nation, and I think that's going to continue.

PI: [19:28] Annie Wauneka was a good example of that, I think, in earlier times.

PZ: [19:35] Annie Wauneka was, I think, an individual that probably did the most of any Navajo leaders. And she did it because that was her personality. She did it without much education. She didn't have the greatest education in the world that one could receive; she didn't have a college degree. But she had qualities that most people admire. And those qualities was the ability to communicate very well with the Navajo people, in the Navajo language, on health issues, for example. She was one of these individuals who had the ability to see what's around the corner -- that most people didn't see. She knew what was coming. And so she anticipated some of these things, and then she did not just not do anything about it. She went out and she did something. And so when the Navajo people were being

affected by tuberculosis -- the Navajo people were dying left and right from tuberculosis -- she did something about it. And so she single-handedly built all of those sanatoriums. One here in Phoenix, and, I believe, one in Colorado Springs. [21:00] And she went before Congress to have Congress appropriate money so that Navajo people who was further along in the tuberculosis, the stage of sickness, those people were then put at these sanatoriums. She visited with them almost maybe twice, or maybe even four times, a year. And so she had that quality. And she's -- she always will remain as one of my favorite Navajo leaders.

PI: [21:32] I think in many Indian communities, you have a -- leadership is something that runs in a family. There's an expectation that when you come of age that -- you know, your father was this, or your grandmother was that, or your uncle was this, and... you know, there's a sense in a lot of different Indian communities that that is something that you're kind of called upon to do in part because you come from a family that historically and in our own time has provided that leadership -- that expectation that you will carry on that. And sometimes it's hard to see, you know, that family, because you can't automatically trace it. But you think about people believing in themselves, and

empowerment, and necessity -- to fight for what is right. And they really had to fight. I mean, they had some good allies, but in the end, it was -- I mean, you think about Tom Dodge, who I think is an overlooked leader of great importance. And had Tom Dodge had his way, the livestock production period would not have gone about, you know, in quite the way it was. Even though he lost that fight, he, um -- you know, he was trying to do the best he could to make that program not quite as terrible as it had been. I mean, if you go back and look at the tribal council minutes, and, you know, you see the speeches that people gave, and the protests they are articulating. And it's not just about livestock production, as you know. It's about conditions for people who are working in fields, off in reservations. So it's a whole series of things. And there's a phrase in English about history, and they say, well, we really need to look more at history as something that people make, rather than have history as something that sort of happens to you. And my sense of Navajo leadership is one that it's engaged in these matters because they say they really don't have any choice. And they need to fight in different ways for themselves. If you look through time, there are a series of issues like that, including our own time. Whether it's water rights or

coal mining, or, you know, a variety of things like that. If you think about someone like Willie Morgan - William Morgan was a pioneer in terms of written Navajo, and working with the linguist Robert Young -- that took real ability and real, you know, what you were talking about -- perceptiveness, or looking into the future. [24:00] He understood that he was not going to be a politician in that sense, but he was going to do something that was really going to make a difference in terms of the language and the language's future. We don't always -- or, you know, you think about somebody like Bob Russell, whom we've mentioned in the past. I mean, some of these are Navajo people, some of these are married to Navajo people. But they're people who, over the course of time, understand something about what the needs and what the obligations are.

When you were the head guy at DNA, that was a leadership position. (pause) Did you -- I mean, we've talked about the McClanahan case and other things. Tell me something more about how leadership was important within that. Was Ted Mitchell a leader, or was he just somebody that made everybody unhappy?

PZ: [25:08] When I was at DNA, I came to the program as a young person. I must have been out of college only several years when I was called upon to head one of the largest American

Indian legal services programs in the United States. You have to look at that situation, where perhaps I was the only non-Indian -- American Indian director at the time. And that raised a lot of questions, mainly from lawyers, and maybe from the state bar, county bar association. How can we have a non-Indian person leading such a large American Indian legal services program? But one -- one -- then, back then, they didn't really understand that to have a skill and to be trained legally was only one aspect of directing the program. Maybe in so many ways, it was better to have a non-Indian or to --

PI: [26:28] At least at that first stage, yeah.

PZ: [26:29] Excuse me, yeah. Maybe it was better to have a non-lawyer director who is an American Indian from that -- from that nation. From that country. And so I was one of those individuals that led a program that was very effective. It was highly respected by the Navajo people. [27:00] Yes, we had a situation where also many of the people from away from the reservation did not really like the activities of the DNA People's Legal Services Program, basically because we were defending the rights of individual American Indians. And so Ted Mitchell was one of these individuals that first came to the Navajo reservation right out of law school at Harvard University.

And he was asked by the ONEO program to build and to establish a legal services program. And I must have been either the third or the fourth person in his administration that was hired to run the legal services program, and so he made me the director of the tribal court advocacy program for the DNA Legal Services.

And Ted Mitchell certainly was a leader. He was a leader in his own right. And he also had legal skills and legal talent. And he was one of those individuals that was not afraid to say what was on his mind. And he was an individual that also cared a lot about the Indian people and the Navajo people. And by everything that he did, it was geared towards protecting the rights of individuals. That every person had certain rights, and he was there to protect those rights and have people understand that situation.

PI: [28:59] When you think about the Navajo country from around, let's say, the 1970s to our own time -- it's been a very challenging time for the Navajo Nation, but there have been some great victories as well. I think the trust fund is something that we've talked about. But if you had to name several accomplishments or things that happened during your (point of?) service as tribal council chair or Navajo Nation chair, I would think that would be near the top of

your list in terms of long-term significance. But one thing is always related to something else, isn't it? I mean, you have one connection with another. But I've often thought about your particular upbringing at Low Mountain and your sense about the chapter house, and the fact that you didn't want Window Rock to be the only place where they were making decisions. [30:00] But the challenge of making equivalent sort of rights or authority or power at the chapter level -- in terms of voting, in terms of a variety of things. That seems to be something that you've been dedicated to for a long time. When you didn't want -- when you became the chairman, you didn't want to be sort of, you know, the imperial president. You wanted to make sure the local people had a say in what was going on. Is that a correct assumption on my part?

PZ: [30:29] Yeah... yeah. I would say that that is probably a correct assumption, because it is something that I was involved in right from the beginning. I mean, I cared about people -- I was very well-versed in what people -- the hardship that people went through. And I also knew about the needs and the desires of individuals that live out in the community of Low Mountain. And I knew that, if given the opportunity, many of the people that I grew up with would take advantage of those opportunities. And so

sometimes you have to be mindful of the fact that when you present those opportunities to individuals, you also know that many of them will take advantage of those opportunities, and it's those individuals that did that that are able to function very well in their community, or even on or off the reservation. Because they saw how important those opportunities were. And one of those opportunities was going out there and receiving your education, and then using that education to better not only your own family, but the whole nation. The Navajo Nation, for example, can benefit from that.

And so, yes, I would say that I spent a lot of my career, a lot of my lifetime, defending the rights of the individual, because I knew that if given some opportunities, these individuals would surface somewhere to become leaders of the Navajo Nation. I guess that's the reason I'm here at Arizona State University -- because I see a lot of good qualities in young people, Navajo people that come through colleges and universities here in the Valley. And when I see one, I always work with them in such a way that they understand, and try to make them understand that they have a duty --

PI: [32:54] Yes.

PZ: [32:55] -- back to their home communities, wherever they

came from. (pause)

PI: [33:00] If you think about the people from the Navajo Nation who come here to school, the numbers -- the statistics are really remarkable. I mean, when you were finishing up at ASU, I bet if somebody said to you "x number of years from now, in contrast to how many Navajos are at ASU right now, there will be a thousand," you know, or whatever the right number is, you would probably have been pretty skeptical that that day would come. And yet you've had a major role in bringing that about, in terms of working with the admissions staff and financial aid and (inaudible) and things like that. Because this is a big university. It's a lot to take on. More to take on than when you were here, you know, in a different way. So there has to be -- also, I would think, a great satisfaction for you, in terms of seeing the concrete, positive results. Not everybody is a success story. But what I find myself saying to Navajo students (inaudible) -- the key message is one of empowerment. Saying "You can do it." You have to believe in yourself, but this is an opportunity. I've seen person after person accept that challenge, and at the end of the year in Neeb Hall or wherever we are, when you're speaking about the people who are graduating or going on, that has to be an evening of particular pride and emotion

for you, I would think.

PI: [34:40] Well, that all came about because I had a vision. And I had a dream of my own, where I -- one of these individuals that really believed that if we can educate more people on the Navajo reservation, [35:00], if we can educate more of our Navajo youngsters, that they would rise to the occasion, become self-sufficient, and solve their own problems. And the way to get to that stage is if you go out and recruit, those students who are able, capable, good character, good academic record, that sees all of this as an opportunity -- if you can get those individuals to a university and then begin working with them, that is something that I wanted to do and wanted to promote. And from my position here, working out of the President's office of Arizona State University, I was able to do that.

It's also one of those things where if you really really really know the situation, you have to set your goals. In other words, when I came here at ASU, one of the things that I was told that the university was really interested in was in getting more students. Well, I had to figure out, how do you get more students? And then I started going out into the communities, I started seeing different tribal governments within the state here, as well as in the southwest, and started recruiting students. And when you

start dealing with those numbers, you have to set a goal for yourself. And so that's when we sat down and said, by the year 2012 or 2015, we've got to have this many American Indian students here on campus. And it's a goal that we set, and what you do is, you have to just -- people that you're working with, you just have to keep on reminding them, you know, that that's the goal. That's something to work for. And so what that does is that every morning when you get up, you have to look at those goals. You have to look at those goals and think about those goals and say "Today, I've got to recruit so many more students that I can convince to come to ASU."

And so I did all of that because I know that if we can get a lot of our Navajo and Indian youngsters to come to ASU, and then put them back on the reservation, that much of the problems that we see out there will come to its own resolution by its own people, you know, from those areas. You can't always have and expect somebody to come in from somewhere and start working on those problems for them. It has to be done from within. And it's those American Indian students that have an opportunity to blossom into a powerful leadership. That's the only way that you can resolve a lot of those issues.

PI: [38:18] It's a fragile business, isn't it? I know during

the time that I was teaching at the college, you know, people who were just doing great in their classes, and you'd come in on Monday morning, and they were gone.

PZ: [38:25] Yeah.

PI: [38:28] You know? And you'd say, "What happened?" Well, you know, there was this problem at home, or that problem that had to be resolved. And, you know, Arizona seems to specialize in absolutely the longest semesters in the history of the world, and, you know, I just have been reminded again and again of how important... you know, sometimes it's a small financial problem, but it doesn't seem small when you're in the middle of it. Or, you know, something's happened at home, or whatever. And I think given the support staff in your office and others, there's been a much better record [39:00] in terms of taking that on and seeing if there's a way you can, you know, help work through this situation, rather than just sort of... I don't know.

But -- you know, I think in American society, more generally, there's more uncertainty about education, and what it will bring, and whether it will take people away from you. And I think you and others deserve a lot of credit for your determination to, you know, set a course that would be productive. I mean, I think we've said this

in our discussion before -- I can't walk across campus, honestly, any time of the day, without seeing Navajo people. And that... that's really something.

PZ: [39:49] Well, that's a wonderful thing to see. I do the same thing. I went to school here at Arizona State University, and I enrolled here in the early 1960s. And when you walk across campus, you didn't see anybody that was native.

PI: [40:05] No. (laughter) No.

PZ: [40:07] And nowadays, I walk across the campus, and it's not unusual, for example, to go from my office over to the law school and along the way have three individuals that stop you, and they want to shake hands and they want to introduce themselves. And those are our own people. Those are our own American Indian students. And the same thing happens when I go from my office over to the President's office or over to the football stadium. It's not unusual to see three to five people that stop you and introduce themselves as individuals who come from your tribe. And it gives me a great feeling, you know, and a lot of satisfaction, in the fact that you're beginning to see many of the Indian students here.

PI: [41:05] I saw that... I don't know what you'd call it -- not really a brochure -- but a publication about ASU and,

you know, looking towards the future. And you're rather prominently featured in that. How did you feel about that?

PZ: [41:24] Well, it's one of those things that you don't actually seek out, to be in that position, or to be mentioned in those kinds of either newspapers or booklets or magazines. But when you work long and hard and long enough, you know, people recognize what's happening. And I think the discussion that we're having today is one of those where people are beginning to realize the significance of American Indian students' presence here at Arizona State University. [42:00] And the magazine that you're referring to is just recognizing the fact that a lot of the work that was done was done by myself and others. And I cannot really take all of the credit for it by myself.

PI: [42:19] No, of course.

PZ: [42:20] There were so many people that had a role in bringing many of these students to the campus here.

PI: [42:33] What are two or three -- two, if you prefer -- major challenges that the Navajo Nation faces today, or have faced in the recent past?

PZ: [42:46] I think one of those challenges, right now, is trying to keep the Navajo government to be accountable to the people. We have -- for the first time, the Navajo

tribal budget is... almost two hundred million.

PI: [43:20] Wow.

PZ: [43:23] I believe the last time I read the -- some of the work that they're doing, regarding generating more revenues with the tribal government, I think they were using something like \$175 million as an annual budget. And when I went into running the Navajo government, it was barely 35, 40 million dollars.

PI: [43:53] Yeah.

PZ: [43:56] And then because of all of the work that we did, we came up to something like fifty or sixty million. And you could run the tribe efficiently with that amount of money, and the tribal government was small. But during the last several years it has really blossomed into such a huge, huge bureaucratic organization. And when you do that, you're going to end up spending more money.

PI: [44:25] Yes.

PZ: [44:29] Because you have more people that are managing a lot of these programs for the Navajo Nation. And I think one of the challenges that they're facing right now is -- how do you have the Navajo Nation government continue to be accountable to the Navajo people, and at the same time becoming efficient in what they do? [45:00]

For example, there's just too many rules that applies to

the daily life of people. And sometimes you really can't do anything about a project that you're trying to pursue without having to get some kind of approval from somewhere or a committee. And sometimes that becomes a very discouraging and disheartening for individuals who want to do something. So I think that's the biggest challenge.

The other challenge that I see right now is manage -- the appropriate management of their resources. We're an Indian tribe that has a huge amount of resources -- diversified resources. We have the coal, we have the uranium, we have the water, we have the land, we have the forests. And we have oil and gas. We have all these natural resources at our disposal on the Navajo. What does one do to effectively manage those resources? And so the balancing act that the Navajo Nation has to do is -- how do you protect and preserve, but at the same time develop those resources to provide employment for the Navajo people? And that's going to take a lot of education; it's going to take some good experts, and it's also going to take a tremendous amount of resources -- a lot of money to do an effective job in the management of those resources. And I would like to see the Navajo people themselves do that.

PI: [46:45] Mm-hmm. Sure.

PZ: [46:46] So I think we're at a stage where the Navajo people are able and capable of doing and managing their own resources. And there's something that I think Navajo people need to do, and that, I would say, is also one of the biggest challenges that they're facing. I mean, we had to worry about water -- water to every community, and Navajo being as large as it is, it requires more resources to do that. And Navajo people need homes; Navajo people need more schools.

PI: [47:24] Diabetes.

PZ: [47:27] And -- yeah. They need all these infrastructure. And to build infrastructure on that reservation is very costly.

PI: [47:34] Yes.

PZ: [47:35] And they have to find ways to do all of that in the most efficient way. To me, that's a big challenge that the Navajo Nation is facing right now.

PI: [47:50] When you think about leaders in the past and the present -- when you think about all of those challenges and difficulties that a president and chair would have to face -- it's like they were joking on election night about Obama. [48:00] They said, "If he wins, he should demand a recount." Because nobody should really want to take all that on. I mean, when you think about the head of the

Navajo Nation, it's just, I mean, it can be rewarding, but it's also even more challenging, even more difficult, even more contrary than probably a winning candidate realizes. You know, to be actually in that chair, in that spot, dealing with those demands. You know, it's easy to be on the outside -- not easy, but it's different.

And I think about -- it's no wonder that the Navajo political battleground has been the way it's been, because it's just unprecedented demands on leadership. And a variety of people are eager, if you give them a chance to -- if you let the President have the opportunity -- to go in some counterproductive directions. And it's like Warren Harding, the President of the United States, said: "It's a hell of a job." You know, it really is. And yet if you can somehow make your way through this gauntlet, this labyrinth, that has to be enormously satisfying to you, but you can certainly recognize why other people in the modern age have, upon occasion, faltered or lost their way somehow.

PZ: [49:26] Well, I think the Navajo people have to recognize that being the Navajo President or Chairman is not easy.

PI: [49:39] (laughter) No.

PZ: [49:40] Particularly with the Navajo, because if you look at the population of the Navajo, you have many non-English-

speaking, traditional people that still hang onto the land. They still live the traditional lifestyle. You also have young people on that reservation that have Master's degrees, doctoral degrees. And they're highly educated, and their demands, from the tribal government or from the Navajo Nation, is way a lot different than the traditional people. So you have a wide... (pause) concepts of the way life is. And because of that -- because of such a vast difference in between those two lifestyles -- it just makes your job a lot harder, because you have to constantly go back and forth, in terms of your working ability, and then the time that you spend on different issues.

And so it's because of that that it's a very complicated, hard position. [51:04] And it takes a skillful person to deal with all of those issues. While if you look at the state of Arizona or the state of New Mexico or California, yeah, they have their problems -- their problems are different -- I don't think it's as hard as the Navajo. Because out here, you can use television, you can use radio. And because of the education and sophistication level of the people that live in these states, you can reasonably expect that whatever it is that you're doing, that they'll catch on. They'll know what you're trying to do. On the Navajo, you have that wide spectrum of beliefs

and lifestyles, and that makes it harder. And so it's something that I think the Navajo people have to really recognize, in terms of the people that they elect to run their government.

PI: [52:13] There's a phrase about the adjoining countries of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, where they say they are inseparably divided. And that's sort of reminded me of Navajo Nation in politics. I mean, you know, people out at Torreon or somewhere like that, or, you know, someone up at Whippoorwill. And, you know, these are people who are not exactly within fighting distance of Window Rock. And they -- you know, even though some things change, that's an ongoing dilemma, and, you know, maybe opportunity too. But it's -- if you think about representation: should there be more women on the council? Should there be more voices heard? And it's difficult, I mean, because people have very different viewpoints from their own life experiences, so.

I've got one last quick question for you. Do you think the best days of Navajo Nation are still to come?

PZ: [53:17] I really believe that... I really believe that, from here on out, you're going to see more Navajo women on the Council in leadership positions, because of what's happening within the tribe. If you look at the last

election -- for chapter elections this last month in November, there are more Navajo young women who were elected at the local chapter houses. And it's just alarming in a good way that these things are happening [54:00] -- for the first time the Navajos don't have that stigma attached to the concept that women shouldn't become leaders. There are more and more of them. And I think that group is gradually going to evolve into getting into the council. And maybe some people may look at that in a negative way. I tend to look at that in a positive way: it's a good development. We should have equality between male and female in the council, because after all, the population is almost evenly balanced between male and female. So we've got to have that representation. So I think good things will come out of that. And I think the Navajo people are at that stage right now.

PI: [55:06] Thank you very much.

PZ: [55:12] Good.

PI: [55:15] Thank you. I was thinking of my old friend Glojean Benson Todacheene. And, you know, she's on the -- what is it, the County Board of Supervisors --

PZ: [55:24] Yeah.

PI: [55:24] -- over in New Mexico. And I just had a Christmas card from her. It says that she's really enjoying it. You

know, she's a tough person. I think that anyone that marries into the Todacheenes probably has to be a tough person to start with. But she's really happy to have this chance -- and she's not so young. But when you think about it, I think the next generation -- I think you're absolutely right. It's really going to be a transformation of the Council, because of the people who are going to be a part of it, you know.

PZ: [55:55] Hmm.

PI: [55:57] If you'd like to just take that with you and give it back to Joyce, I was giving it as a gift to them, but I thought you might like to borrow it and just take a look at it, if you want to.

PZ: [56:03] OK. I'd like to look at it. Yeah, read it. And then bring it back to Joyce?

PI: [56:07] Yeah, just -- yeah, I'm, I mean, after --

PZ: [56:09] Bring it back to Joyce. OK.

PI: [56:11] I want to make sure that some of these paper things that I have, you know, get passed along, so that other people can use them. We had that term paper assignment, you know, last semester, about DNA Legal Services. And it was great to see all these students in the classroom, coming in to look at your papers and DNA stuff. And, you know, I think they were very positive about that, and

really learned a lot about that. I mean, when you think about how long this outfit has been going, and how many lives it's touched, it's really something.

But it's interesting to me as a historian, I guess, to go back and look at, you know, these early issues and these early discussions that were going on. (pause)

PZ: [57:08] Good. OK.

PI: [57:10] Thank you.

PZ: [57:11] I'd like to look at it.

PI: [57:13] Yeah, sure. That's fine.

PZ: [57:19] Good.

PI: [57:20] OK.

PZ: [57:21] Well, I've got to -- I've got to run, my friend.

PI: [57:22] Yeah, I know you do.

PZ: [57:23] Yeah.

PI: [57:24] Thanks for your --

END OF AUDIO FILE

END OF INTERVIEW