

JoAnn B. Jayne, Chief Justice of the Navajo Nation, introduced herself to the 24th Navajo Nation Council during her quarterly report Jan. 28.

Jayne is Tábąąhá, born for Kinyaa'áanii. She is from the community of Tohatchi and has been serving as the chief justice or Aląąjí Hashkééjí Nahat□á since Jan. 24, 2018.

She told the Council that the Judicial Branch is looking forward to working with the new Council Delegates, Law and Order Committee, and the new President and Vice President.

Jayne said that the Judicial Branch is working toward the vision of resolving cases as soon as the courts can.

"That is what justice is about and that is what we need to give to our Diné people," she said.

She noted that when she goes out to the chapters and communities, people come up to her and say, "Ahéhee□."

Though people often try to ask her about specific cases, Jayne said that she cannot answer those questions but can help to steer people in the right direction of where to get help.

“The very, very essence of this judiciary is that we remain impartial and that we are independent and that anyone who comes to the court system are going to know that they are going to have confidence to the best that we can do,” she said.

Jayne said that she is moving forward with training for judges that is required as part of the Personnel Rules for Judges and Justices so that the people can have confidence that their judges are fair.

She said the Judicial Branch does have challenges, such as having vacancies for one associate justice and nine judge positions. The branch currently has only nine judges who cover 12 judicial district courts and an associate justice and chief justice who sit on the Supreme Court.

“I’d like to tell the Diné we are going to get to your case. I know it’s slow. It has been but we are working as hard as we can right now,” she said.

Jayne said the Judicial Branch was given the responsibility to also educate the people and the branch does so with the support of grant funds that help the branch to provide veterans and youth outreach and assist the branch with policy development.

In answering questions from the delegates, she said the issues affecting recruitment of judges include lack of housing, the salaries offered to new judges, and the rigorous appointment process. She noted that the process has changed where the Law and Order Committee delegated its role in reviewing applications and making recommendations on appointment of judges to the Judicial Conduct Commission.

However, the branch needs help from the Legislative and Executive Branches with more funding and housing.

“I believe the Judicial Branch is at a crisis right now,” she said.

Jayne also explained that Window Rock Judicial District is now sharing building and office space with the Supreme Court and Administrative Office of the Courts. The Window Rock Judicial District’s peacemaking office is also in a former housing unit.

The Chief Justice’s report was accepted with a vote of 22 in favor and none opposed. This was the first regular session of the 24th Navajo Nation Council.

Jayne provided a written report to the Council, which is available in the Judicial Branch’s Fiscal Year 2019 First Quarter Report. The quarterly report covers the period from Oct. 1, 2018 to Dec. 31, 2018 and is available on the *www.navajocourts.org* website.

Staff Reports