

GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY

Executive Office of the Governor & Lieutenant Governor

“Gila River Strong”

Stephen Roe Lewis
Governor



Regina Antone
Lieutenant Governor

100-Day Plan

February 1, 2024

Our Community has much to be thankful for:

- Our rich history and traditions,
- Our precious natural resources; our *jeved* and our *shudag*, and,
- Our People and our families, and the importance we place in our relationships, and in our connections to each other.

It is our relationships and our connections to each other as Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh people that makes us strong; that make us resilient in the face of hardships and challenges. And we do face challenges -- on-going threats to our water, our lands, our sovereignty, our very existence as Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh people.

Rising to such challenges, however, has been our tradition for generations, and we have always prevailed when our people have been unified and stood strong together as the proud Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh people we are. I am confident we will do so again.

As we face our challenges, we must also be aware that we are also presented with many important opportunities for creating a better life for our people. These opportunities come from our partnerships and strong relationships with the federal government, our federal delegation, Governor Hobbs and our state and local neighbors and friends. As we rise to confront our challenges, we must also work hard to ensure that we capture the benefits of these important opportunities as well.

Embarking on my fourth term in office, I enter into this next Administration with the same excitement and energy that I did in my first term and with a strong vision for our future. When I asked for your support for another term, it was because I believe

- that we can build on our past successes – and there are many;
- that we have learned from our past challenges – which are also many; and,
- that together as a resilient Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh people, and with our many partners, we can build a lasting legacy in key areas such as water, land, and tribal

infrastructure, and we can do so while making decisions that honor and preserve our *himdag*.

I want to start this new term of office by describing what I refer to as a “100-day plan” to highlight the areas that I believe will be important to the Community over the next three years. This 100-Day Plan, set forth below, is a roadmap for how the Council and the Executive will take steps together to continue existing efforts, initiate new ones, create working groups to study the feasibility of others, and where possible, take immediate action, all within the first 100 days of our new Administration. At the end of the 100-days, I will provide a report to the Community so you are fully aware of where each Executive initiative stands.

Our goal with this 100-Day Plan is to ensure that the Community leadership works as a team to move forward and maintain all the momentum we have built over these past, very productive years. Memorializing this Plan is one way of giving the new Executive team an initial project list to work on, and I will work tirelessly, with Lt. Governor Regina Antone, in the coming 13 weeks to ensure we are making progress across the board.

PRIORITY # 1: Protecting and using our *shudag*, our water

This has been and will remain a top priority for Executive and Council. While we have accomplished much in the past few years, we still face many challenges, and we have new opportunities to pursue together to ensure we have the ability to use our water when and how we need it.

Community Council fully supports our Executive efforts on water and agrees that protecting this precious resource must remain one of Executive’s very top priorities. We have already agreed together that the time is right for Council and Executive to work together to update our strategic plan for water with the development and adoption of a Second Five-Year Water Plan. We held our first Council Work Session on January 19 to start the process for developing this new strategic plan for using and protecting our precious water. This was a very productive work session and I anticipate calling three more work sessions in my first 100-days with the goal of having the new Five-Year Water Plan developed and ready for adoption by the end of April.

Our First Five-Year Water Plan, adopted by Council in 2015, has been an incredible success. Working with Council, we identified our challenges that affect our water and tackled them. Most importantly, back then we were confronted with ever-increasing water costs as we looked to fully implement our water settlement. Spiraling costs for CAP water, federal government mismanagement of our subsidy accounts, and a potential shortfall in funding for our on-Reservation infrastructure are what drove our planning and response.

As noted above, the Community’s response was incredibly successful:

- defending our water rights from involuntary reductions without mitigation,
- pushing for a solution to our long-term federal water subsidy concerns,
- expanding our Managed Aquifer Recharge program,

- developing innovative new water delivery infrastructure like our Reclaimed Water Pipeline Project, which will be completed later this year,
- completing the funding for our Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project, and,
- as a way of attacking both our long-term water costs and the root cause of the drought -- climate change -- we have launched the first-ever in the Western Hemisphere solar-covered canal project, with the help of our strong partners, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers.

As we face our next challenges on water, the time is right for an entirely new Five-Year Water Plan, one that will focus now not so much on the cost of our water, but on its long-term availability. Working with Council, we will work to ensure our water delivery infrastructure is as efficient as possible, conserving every drop for actual beneficial use, and lowering our costs through solar power generation. This will be the foundation for my vision of a “blue-green economy” – blue for water conservation and green for renewable energy development.

We will also be fighting hard in the coming days to ensure that our water entitlement from the Colorado River is safe from involuntary, uncompensated reductions, all while looking to develop new water supplies to shift our reliance on water from the Colorado to more durable sources within the State.

We will continue our fight against all those who seek to take our water rights away, especially in the Upper Valley of the Gila River.

All this will be in our Second Five-Year Water Plan, and more, and we will be working with Council to develop this critical strategic plan over the coming 100 days.

PRIORITY #2: Modernizing our government buildings

Water is a top priority, but we also need to continue our successful efforts to modernize our government and our ability to serve the people. One of the key areas where I think we can make immediate progress is in continuing our effort to modernize our government buildings and infrastructure.

You are all aware of the Community’s role in piloting what we call the “105(l) lease-construction program” at the Department of the Interior – named after a section of the Indian Self-Determination Act. We developed this innovative program with Congress as a way to construct our new Gila Crossing and Casa Blanca Community Schools. Our success with those projects led us to use that same program to construct our new Police Department which we will be completed in the first part of this year, and to launch construction for our new public safety building in District Four that we broke ground on last fall.

The 105(l) lease-construction program allows us to construct eligible government administration buildings and then lease the building back to the federal government and receive annual lease payments to pay for the cost of construction. This allows us to move forward with new government buildings that are essential to improving our government services at our pace,

while ensuring that the United States honors its trust obligation to fund and maintain those buildings.

Using this innovative lease-construction program, we will start a process with Council to consider the development of a new tribal administration building, or buildings, that will allow us to move all of our tribal departments that are still housed in outdated modular units and trailers into a new structure that will enable them to directly improve their operations and efficiency in providing all of the essential services on which you, the people, rely.

These old modular units and trailers are the structures of the past – inefficient and unhealthy – and we need to put them in the past where they belong. I want to continue to work for a future where our tribal employees have the safe and efficient facilities they need to carry out programs – to provide the best services for our members.

During our first 100 days we will start the process with Council to form an Owner’s Team to plan one or more new government administration buildings to better serve the needs of our members, using the same 105(l) lease-construction program that the Community itself has created with the United States to ensure the building is built by us – for us – but funded by the federal government.

We have also been able to use the 105(l) lease program to develop new revenue streams for the Community. We will work with Treasurer and Office of General Counsel to identify any additional opportunities for such leases and work in the first 100-days to submit such leases to the Department of the Interior to capture such revenues for the Community’s benefit. One such 105(l) lease opportunity is a lease for our new Blackwater Community School, which Council has already approved as an appropriate subject for just such a lease. We will make it a priority to move that lease forward in our first 100-days, and then work with the Education and Standing Committee to determine if the revenues from that particular lease might be appropriate for funding key education initiatives like our proposed language initiative or other education programs for our students.

PRIORITY #3: Roads

Working closely with Council, I have made transportation infrastructure overall a major priority for my past Administrations and this one will be no different. One of the very top priorities in my last Administration was securing funding for completion of the improvement of the I-10, and doing so in a manner that benefited the Community and our members, not just those who travel on that major highway.

To this end, I worked closely with Governor Hobbs to develop a federal grant proposal to fund the final portion of the cost for the improvement of the I-10 from Casa Blanca Road east to the Reservation boundary. This was an innovative effort, with the Community, working through Council, directly involved in the planning for the grant. We then advocated for the grant jointly, Community and State together, working closely with our federal congressional delegation.

Obtaining this federal grant for \$95 million was a major priority for our first 100-days, and just this week, we have heard favorable news from Secretary Buttigieg that we will indeed be

awarded these critical funds. Keeping the I-10 project on track will remain a high priority for our first 100-days.

This is such an important priority for our Community, and the plan we developed together not only widens the highway, it improves our *access* to it by including a critical new intersection at Seed Farm Road which will revolutionize our travel on Reservation; galvanizing our economy, saving lives, and changing the way all of us travel here on the Community.

Success on finalizing the funding for the I-10 improvement project is essential, but we cannot stop there. We must also identify the next major transportation projects on Reservation, with Council, and then begin efforts to identify the funding for those projects.

PRIORITY #4: Extending and protecting our Reservation boundaries

The next Executive priority is the extension and protection of our tribal lands. During the first 100 days of our new Administration, we will make a priority the addition of lands to our land base; namely, putting the Blackwater Store parcel in trust and finalizing the land acquisition that was contained in our Trust Accounting legislation. We passed both acquisitions through Congress, but now we need to finalize the federal administrative actions to have the lands placed into trust and we will make this a priority for our first 100 days.

As we add to our land-base, we also must protect our existing lands. We are seeing far too much encroachment onto the Reservation, and we are also seeing too much trespassing on the Reservation and illegal dumping of waste onto our lands. If we do not address this head on, the problems will continue to get worse and impact the safety of our Community members.

Our 100-Day Plan, therefore, includes the establishment of a Task Force with Community Council and our Departments to take the steps necessary to work with neighboring jurisdictions to address this multi-jurisdictional issue.

PRIORITY #5: Language Program

We must prioritize preserving and teaching our languages to our families and our youth. I want to work with our elders, our Tribal Education Department, our youth representatives, our Heritage Center and others to see if we can develop a more formalized language program that will complement our school programs to be available for all Community members.

There is no greater gift we can give to our Community members than the legacy of our own languages. So, I will ask you, our Community, to help me determine the best way to develop a program that we can make accessible to all our Community members – those living within the Community and those in urban areas. During our first 100 days I will get a Working Group set up for this purpose.

PRIORITY #6: Veterans

This past year our Veteran and Family Services Office received accreditation as a Veterans Service Office which means greater access to Veterans Affairs records and processes, which significantly improves the ability to serve veterans both on the Community's Reservation and off. I am enormously proud of our veterans for this designation – which is only the second awarded in all of Indian Country.

In our first 100 days, I will sit down with our veterans on Council and our Veterans and Family Services Office to see what their priorities are for this next year and see how we can be supportive of the needs of our veterans and their families. Our Community has a proud history of service, and it is our responsibility to make sure our veterans have what they need to support themselves, their families, and other veterans.

PRIORITY #7: Voter engagement plan

We are facing a critical federal and state election cycle coming up. We need to develop a plan to mobilize the Community vote that makes sure our tribal vote counts. This takes work, sustained effort and coordination with State and federal election officials, and our Community Public Affairs Office. It will be a priority of our Administration in the first 100 days to develop a voter engagement plan to limit the obstacles to voting for our people, to ensure that there is a clear path for them to register, to make sure our members are educated about any referendums and the ballots, and that there available voting places on our Reservation to get them out to vote. We must keep up the progress from the last election cycle to ensure our voice will be heard.

PRIORITY #8: O'Otham and Pee Posh elders gathering

Many of our elders have expressed a desire for more regular contact with our O'Otham and Pee Posh relatives and friends. Our Administration will make it a priority in our first 100 days to explore with our sister tribes whether we can establish a new annual event that would bring together the elders of the Four Tribes. I have already informally spoken with Council and the tribal leaders of our sister tribes and they agree this is a great idea. The next step is to begin a formal planning process, working with Council, to see if we can plan the inaugural event this year, perhaps with the Community hosting.

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Respectfully,



Stephen Roe Lewis, Governor
Gila River Indian Community

CHECKLIST OF EXECUTIVE PRIORITIES

FOR FIRST 100 DAYS

- Finalize Second Five-Year Water Plan with Council.
- Initiate construction on Phase II of solar-covered canal project and explore ways of expanding program for future phases or other Community-owned solar power generation.
- Establish Owner's Team to examine possible new government administration building to replace current modular units and trailers housing various government departments.
- Move forward with new Section 105(l) lease for Blackwater Community School.
- Work with Education Standing Committee to determine if revenues from new Blackwater Community School lease might be used to fund education programs for all our students on Reservation.
- Meet with veterans to identify priorities and ways to improve services.
- Ensure the success of the federal DOT grant for \$95 million for the completion of the I-10 improvement project on Reservation.
- Identify with Council the next major road improvement projects on Reservation and plan for finding state, federal and local government funding for them.
- Work with Office of General Counsel to accelerate process for putting Blackwater Store parcel in trust.
- Work with Office of General Counsel to accelerate process for putting Trust Accounting lands on West End into trust.
- Establish a Task Force comprised of Council and Departments to address issue of encroachments and trespass and begin to develop solutions for Council consideration.
- Prepare voter engagement plan.
- Initiate formal planning process of O'Otham and Pee Posh elders gathering.