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Contact: Mihio Manus, Sr. Public Information Officer  
Office of the President and Vice President

The Navajo Nation  
Phone: (928)871-7728  
Fax: (928)871-4025

## VICE PRESIDENT NEZ CALLS FOR ATTENTION TO WATER RIGHTS, EDUCATION, AND MEDICAID IN TRIBAL CONSULTATION WITH GOVERNOR DUCEY



During a tribal consultation meeting with Arizona Governor Doug Ducey, Vice President Nez addressed the need to establish clear water rights for the Navajo Nation and develop the capacity to deliver adequate supplies of affordable water.

PHOENIX, AZ—During a meeting between Arizona tribal leaders and Governor Doug Ducey, Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez told the Governor that when tribal nations are prosperous, Arizona is also prosperous.

Tribal leaders were afforded time to present issues facing their tribal communities before Governor Ducey in a consultation session held in the Monte Vista Room at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Ariz.

Vice President Nez called attention to water rights, increased resources for education, a Navajo specific Medicaid system and withdrawing Arizona's support of

the amicus brief in the *Dollar General Corporation vs. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians* case.

Vice President Nez noted the need to establish clear water rights for the Navajo Nation and develop the capacity to deliver adequate supplies of affordable water.

"It is a priority for the Navajo Nation to get back to the negotiating table to openly discuss its water rights relative to the Little Colorado and Colorado Rivers with all relevant parties. We look forward to working with you in bringing critical parties back to the table to find viable solutions to this major challenge for the Navajo Nation.

Be our champion on this issue," Vice President Nez said.

Vice President Nez affirmed that the Begaye-Nez administration supports language revitalization and cultural preservation among education systems on the Navajo Nation. A stable foundation for Native peoples in Arizona can be found in their indigenous languages, culture and traditions, he said.

He noted that budgets for education have faced cuts in recent years. In the short run, the fact is Navajo Nation cannot afford any further cuts in the education of our youth.

As with most rural school dis-

tricts, the Nation's school districts are struggling. Money is not the only challenge but it is a major challenge for schools that needs to be addressed.

"The Navajo Nation's leaders are working with Navajo education leaders to develop other recommendations focused on improving education for Native American students across Arizona. We look forward to meeting with you when our plan is refined to discuss it with you for your consideration," he said.

The Navajo Nation has developed a position on taking over its own Medicaid program. A feasibility study was conducted



Arizona Governor Doug Ducey (center) stands with Vice President Jonathan Nez (right) and Speaker Lorenzo Bates (left) at a tribal consultation meeting held at the Heard Museum on Monday, Nov. 30.

by the Navajo Division of Health in May 2014. The results of the study show that it would be feasible for the Navajo Nation to operate as a Medicaid Agency.

The study accessed the cross jurisdictional health care disparities, eligibilities, enrollment processes, amount of reimbursements, mandatory service and data access.

Based on the study, the Navajo Nation will call upon appropriate Federal agencies to support the feasibility planning design for a Navajo Nation Medicaid Agency.

"We have the professional capacity to do this," he said. "We need state support in pushing for Congressional approval on this issue."

Vice President Nez addressed an outcry within Indian Country over the *Dollar General Corporation vs. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians* case.

He reminded Governor Ducey of a letter the Navajo Nation had sent him regarding an amicus brief the State of Arizona had signed onto, filed by the State of Oklahoma.

The amicus brief dismisses tribal courts and suggests that state courts are, in all instances, the appropriate forums for tort-claims against non-Indians who harm tribal citizens on tribal lands. Vice President Nez said the state of Arizona has always recognized the jurisdiction

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of tribal courts to prosecute crimes that take place on tribal lands.

"We respectfully ask that the State of Arizona withdraw from the State of Oklahoma's amicus brief," he said.

Speaker of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council Lorenzo Bates was in attendance and brought forth concerns regarding the Nation's energy issues, specifically coal-based revenues. Speaker Bates said that coal is a major industry for the Nation, in terms of both employment

and revenue.

"We look to you to advocate and promote the fact that the Navajo Nation has taken hits by shutting down several of our power plants. Yet, there continue to be more regulations handed down from the federal government."

Speaker Bates said he feels the Nation has gone above and beyond to comply with federal regulations. He called for State support in transitioning from coal-based to alternative forms of energy.

In closing, Vice President Nez extended the invitation from both himself and President Russell Begaye to visit the Navajo Nation.

He expressed appreciation to the Governor for bringing tribal leaders together for the purpose of consultation.

Governor Ducey acknowledged the issues presented by the many tribal leaders in attendance. He committed to fostering ongoing communication the Governor's Office and Arizona Indian nations.

"What I want to do is spend less time talking and more time working," Governor Ducey said. "This idea of consultation is important to me."

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