



THE NAVAJO NATION

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WE ARE NATIONS, LET'S ACT LIKE IT, PRESIDENT RUSSELL BEGAYE SAYS AT NCAI



During his speech at the 72nd NCAI convention in San Diego, President Russell Begaye called for federal recognition of Native American sovereignty, representation within the Presidential Cabinet and solidarity between tribes to move issues forward.

SAN DIEGO- Before the 72nd Annual Convention of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye delivered a speech reinforcing the inherent sovereignty of Native American nations.

"When it comes to minorities in this country, national leaders need to know that we are not just another minority group. We are Native nations. We have been established as nations. Treat us as nations," President Begaye said to the gathered tribal leaders.

President Begaye said it's both critical and urgent that the Feder-

al Government affords water and mineral rights to tribes rather than opposing them.

"The Federal Government believes we are not capable of overseeing our coal and our minerals. We need full rights," he said. "The government knows that water belongs to Indian nations; it's our ancestral right. The Winters Doctrine establishes this."

President Begaye reinforced the jurisdiction of tribal law on tribal lands without exception to a criminal's ethnicity or nationality.

"When crimes are committed on Indian land, our jurisdiction allows us to impose our Indian laws," he said. "If you commit a

crime on tribal land, you should go to a tribal jail."

He also called for President Obama to appoint a Native American leader to sit on the White House Council on Native American Affairs.

"How many Native American leaders sit on that council?" he asked. "Zero. Yet these are our futures they determine. We are capable of standing up for ourselves."

Although the Navajo Nation is not a member of NCAI, the Congress extended an invitation for President Begaye to speak at the convention. President Begaye supported NCAI's purpose and

advocacy on behalf of Native American rights and issues that affect tribal sovereignty.

President Begaye's speech was met with resounding applause at several points and upon conclusion it warranted a standing ovation.

"Indian people need to work together. We need to stand by our culture and our prayers for the purposes of our precious resources and land," he said. "We need our voices to be heard at the White House level. Let's not work against each other, we need to work together."