



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 13, 2016

Communications Office
Office of the President and Vice President
Michele J. Crank
Mihio Manus
928.871.7000

ECONOMIC SUMMIT GATHERS TRIBAL LEADERS AND ENTREPRENEURS TO CREATE SOLUTIONS TO BUILDING ECONOMIES

TWIN ARROWS-Building tribal economies while maintaining tribal identities were key themes of discussion during the Opening General Session for the 2016 Navajo Nation Economic Summit held at the Twin Arrows Casino Resort on Tuesday, Apr. 12.

Lance Morgan, President and Chief Executive Officer of Ho Chunk Inc., Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, was the session's keynote speaker.

Of the many topics in his address, Morgan talked about the importance of separating business and politics within tribal communities.

To do this, he said, the Winnebago Tribe was effective in utilizing boards while defining clear roles and responsibilities between tribal council, governing boards and the corporations.

"A politician's view is different than that of a businessman. If you're going to be serious about economic development then you need to get the political process out of the business making process."

Director of the Division of Economic Development, Crystal Deschinsky said the insight Morgan presented provided encouragement for the Nation to follow in similar footsteps.

"The Winnebago tribe is completely different but if we can take away some things to help us grow our economy then I think that's what makes this conference worthwhile," she said.

In fostering economic development on the Navajo Nation, President Russell Begaye said the Nation needs to consider creating business opportunity zones where entrepreneurs can start business while receiving taxes breaks or other beneficial assistance.

President Begaye also reinforced the need to build infrastructure to support economic development.

"We need infrastructure. We need electricity and we need water-lines. To start a business, you need adequate water and power. Our current system isn't enough to hold up a strong economy. We need to build it up," he said.

Professor at Northern Arizona University in Applied Indigenous



At the 2016 Navajo Nation Economic Summit, President Russell Begaye said his administration has prioritized building adequate infrastructure to support a strong economy.



Vice President Jonathan Nez told the gathered audience that the Navajo Nation needs to find ways to diversify its economy while maintaining cultural values.



Tyron Chee from the Division of Economic Development provided a traditional song and invocation for the opening session.

Studies, Dr. Manley Begay spoke on developing tribal economies by reforming tribal governments to embrace cultural teachings but he also touched upon separating politics from business.

“Politics cannot get involved in business operation. We need to change our government to be more Navajo in essence. Our goal shouldn’t be to make more money but to protect language, culture and our land, Diné bí’ Keyah,” he said. “It should be about maintaining who we are as a people.”

Dr. Begay commended the Office of the President and Vice President for organizing and putting on the 2016 Economic Summit. He said it provided energy in thinking around the challenges that all tribes face in developing successful economies.

“Once you get the energy going, you begin to develop creative solutions to challenges,” he said. “This summit is providing the opportunity for this energy to be funneled toward creative solutions.”

On the Navajo Nation, there is a need to establish a balance between culture and economy said Vice President Jonathan Nez. This discussion is central to the 2016 Economic Summit, he said.

“We need to find ways to diversify the Navajo economy. We need to diversify local economies while keeping culture in mind,” he said. “How do we balance this? Sometimes we have to remember the teachings of our grandparents to take care of the land while also maintaining spiritual wellness.”

The 2016 Navajo Nation Economic Summit will take place at the Twin Arrows Casino and Resort through Thursday, Apr. 14 with workshops, breakout session and panels revolving discussion around building tribal economies.

###



Keynote speaker for the opening session, Lance Morgan, stressed the importance of separating business from politics to ensure economic success.



Both Vice President Nez and President Begaye listened to the keynote address provided by Winnebago tribal member Lance Morgan.