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PRESIDENT BEGAYE ADDRESSES COMMUNICATION ISSUES WITH FCC COMMISSIONER CLYBURN

CROWNPOINT-On Monday, Aug. 8, President Russell Begaye met with Federal Communications Commissioner Mignon Clyburn addressing the telecommunication needs that exist on the Navajo Nation, which support the development of critical infrastructure.

Existing limitations in wireless and broadband services across the Navajo Nation affect many service areas including education, health and public safety.

President Begaye told Commissioner Clyburn that the Navajo Nation is building an oncology facility in the Western Agency and that fiber optic communication is a critical infrastructure need.

“We are excited about the oncology center that will be built in Tuba City. Our people really need it,” President Begaye said. “In order to make this happen we have to address our fiber optic capabilities. We are not where we need to be in respect to fiber optics.”

Director of Navajo Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (NTRC), Theresa Hopkins said improving telecommunication will help facilitate putting an emergency alert system like Amber Alert, in place on the Navajo Nation.

“Without that backbone in place, the infrastructure to communication across all communities, even the best laid plans won’t mean anything,” Hopkins said.

This is one of the reasons NTRC is looking at groups to partner with on certain initiatives and also for purposes of information sharing.

“Today we heard that the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority is working with Cellular One and that Cellular One has previously worked with Frontier,” she said. “We need to promote more of these types of relationships.”

Hopkins said another purpose for the meeting was to gauge how effective funding for Navajo programs has been. She said the FCC provides funding to the Nation through E-Rate for libraries and schools and also for telemedicine programs.



Navajo Technical University hosted a luncheon at their culinary arts school where FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn met with stakeholders from various communication enterprises as well as President Russell Begaye and Representative Ben Ray Lujan.

“We need to assess if the funding is being used in positive way. In addition, we need to know if the FCC needs to provide funding in other areas where the Nation needs it,” Hopkins said.

Commissioner Clyburn agreed that the Navajo Nation’s communication capacity can only be realized to the fullest when the Nation has affordable connectivity.

“If people cannot afford it they cannot use it and they need to be able to connect at their homes,” Clyburn said. “I am with you and I do not believe in settling. I’m here to tell you this, we must do this together.”

The commissioner said for her to be effective, she needs to know what types of rules and regulations the Navajo Nation needs to be put into policy.

President Begaye told Clyburn that he would like to see Navajo companies afforded the ability to provide services to rural areas like outside companies are doing.

“It’s always good to see you,” President Begaye said. “We are excited about your visit here today with us.”

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