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PRESIDENT BEGAYE MEETS WITH NM DIGNITARIES TO FURTHER NATION TO NATION RELATIONSHIPS



President Begaye and key staff members met with NM Governor Suzanne Martinez and Cabinet Secretary Hanna Skandera of Education to address infrastructure issues that would benefit Navajo Nation schools in New Mexico.

SANTA FE-On Tuesday, Feb. 2, President Begaye embarked on a daylong schedule of meetings with New Mexico dignitaries in and around the Round House in Santa Fe, N.M.

Accompanied by members of the Executive staff, President Begaye's first stop was with N.M. Attorney General, Hector Balderas to discuss the Gold King Mine spill.

In their meeting, Attorney General Balderas told President Begaye that he would advocate that the State of New Mexico and the Navajo Nation are aligned in their plight for recovery for damages incurred during the spill.

"I will be as vocal as need be," said Attorney Balderas.

The Attorney General said he would like to do a site visit to the Navajo Nation to see the impacts the spill left on the Nation. President Begaye said the Attorney General's visit would be

beneficial in assessing areas of concern and to see how the spill has affected the livelihood of farmers living along the San Juan.

President Begaye also met with N.M. Cabinet Secretary of Environment, Ryan Flynn and members of his staff regarding the Gold King Mine spill.

Secretary Flynn thanked Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch and the Legal Counsel to the President for establishing working relationships and respecting Navajo Nation sovereignty.

"I hope we are doing everything possible to help with movement forward, we always want to keep you informed", stated Flynn.

Flynn said New Mexico will focus on three areas primarily:



President Begaye and members of OPVP met with NM Cabinet Secretary of Indian Affairs, Kelly Zunie to discuss Tribal Infrastructure Projects.

To be fully compensated for costs incurred; to have the mines properly cleaned up; and to seek that the watershed is fully compensated for.

“We are right there with you on your objectives,” said President Begaye.

NM Cabinet Secretary of Indian Affairs, Kelly Zunie invited President Begaye and staff to her office for discussion on Tribal infrastructure projects (TIF).

She thanked President Begaye for keeping his promise in sending a staff member from the Office of the President and Vice President (OPVP) to address the TIF project issues.

OPVP staff will continue to work on expediting and addressing these issues in a timely manner, so communities with projects are completed, said President Begaye.

The President also met with the Honorable N.M. Governor Susanna Martinez and Cabinet Secretary of Education, Hanna Skandera.

Dr. Tommy Lewis, Division of Dine Education (DODE) and Dr. Calvin White embarked on sharing detailed information on 32 Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and 34 grant schools that serve 15,000 Navajo students on the Navajo Nation.

“With a total of 260 schools serving 85,000 Navajo students on the Navajo Nation, I was told by the AZ State Education Depart-

ment that DODE is larger than their state educational program,” said Dr. Lewis.

President Begaye also informed Governor Martinez about the situation with inadequate and unsafe roads that transport Navajo students to and from school. These road are especially bad after rain and snowfall.

“These roads become too muddy for buses to safely transport our children on. A repercussion being they sometimes cause our children to walk great distance to catch the bus to school,” he said.

Governor Martinez was also informed about the former Bennett Freeze Area (FBFA) and the efforts that OPVP is undertaking to provide adequate infrastructure and development to the area. Governor Martinez was unfamiliar with the FBFA and shocked that an area could remain in a state of frozen development and repair.

President Begaye highlighted to the Governor how he has given directive to the Executive Staff and division directors to pool efforts and resources in fast tracking development for the FBFA. He also noted that there needs to be a thoughtful and strategic development of plans put in place for quality progress to occur.

Meeting with key legislators, the Attorney General and Governor Martinez are steps toward making progress in facilitating projects and a cohesive understanding in which the Navajo Nation can work with the State of New Mexico for the Navajo people.