



THE NAVAJO NATION

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‘WE ARE A NATION, NOT A FEDERAL PROGRAM’, PRESIDENT BEGAYE STATES AT AZ TRIBAL LEGISLATIVE DAY



L to R: Ak-Chin Indian Community Chairman Louis Manuel, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community President Delbert Ray, Sr., stand together during the 21st Annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day.

PHOENIX-On Jan. 19, the galley was packed and the floor of the 52nd Arizona House of Representatives filled with Arizona’s 22 Tribal leadership and royalty. President Russell Begaye was one of three tribal leaders on the agenda as a featured speaker.

Prior to the joint protocol session, AZ House of Representatives, President Begaye’s meeting with AZ Legislature Representative Jennifer D. Benally was a discussion enlightening legislation being introduced and proposed.

In addition Rep. Benally informed the president of a tour given to Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), “Safe School Bus Routes”. Benally stated, as a result of this tour ADOT representative obtained first hand experiences and challenges school buses and children encounter while being transported to school. We were able to obtain support from ADOT to create four safe bus pullouts.

The Indian Child Welfare Act, (ICWA) was also a topic of discussion, concerns of the State of Arizona not following through on placement of Indian children in Indian homes.

President Begaye started his speech paying tribute to the two Navajo Code Talkers Ernest Yazhe and Alfred Peaches, who recently passed requesting all rise and honor with a moment of silence.

Before the moment of silence, the President reminded the audience that there was not a single bullet, no tanks, and no guns more effective than our Navajo language that won World War II. We will always honor our iconic heroes of the Navajo Nation with pride and great accolades for the incredible service they gave to the United States of America and its people, stated President Begaye.

President Begaye acknowledged the work of our three Navajo legislators with encouraging words and gratitude for speaking on behalf of the rights of our Navajo people.

He reminded the legislators and audience of the beauty of the Navajo Nation and its people. "We are not a third world country, we are a Nation rich in heritage, culture, and beautiful people. We are NOT a federal program, stated President Begaye. The audience loudly applauded this statement.

President Begaye's first point of discussion was water rights, also reminding the legislators and the attending delegation not to exclude the Navajo Nation out of discussions as it relates to our natural resources such as water, minerals, and land. You do not have the right to discuss what belongs to the Navajo Nation without our participation, stated President Begaye.

His second point of discussion was the attack on our sovereignty as it related to taxes and ICWA. We have the right based on this Act, to place Navajo children with Navajo families, the Goldwater Institute lawsuit is an attack and is compromising our sovereignty. Take heed Arizona Tribal leaders we will not allow this to happen as it will set bad precedence, said President Begaye.

The Navajo Nation is sovereign and has the right to tax but the state of Arizona taxes non-Indian owned business on the Navajo Nation and this dual taxation is compromising our ability to establish economic development on our Nation. The State of New Mexico has already passed a law allowing only Navajo taxes be applicable to businesses on the Navajo Nation regardless of non-Indian owned.

President Begaye urged the legislators of Arizona to stop killing our economy and pass a law as the state of New Mexico has already completed.

The third point President Begaye reminded the legislators of is the federal to tribal government relationship the Nation and all Indian Nation has as it relates to U.S. government federal dollars. President Begaye said, "Don't let this be a pass through the state of Arizona, these federal dollars need to come directly to the Navajo Nation".

We have been good neighbors; every payday on the Navajo Nation, the Wal-Mart stores boarding our Navajo Nation becomes the "Navajo Nation". We support the boarding cities of Flagstaff, Winslow, Phoenix, Gallup and Holbrook, \$35 million dollars we contribute to your economies, said President Begaye.

Governor Stephen Lewis of the Gila River Indian Community was one of the featured guest speakers. Informing the legislators and audience of the \$1.1 billion dollars that our tribal communities contribute to the State.

In closing, President Begaye's compelling speech, he thanked the legislative body for promoting programs such as dual education programs for high school students and "First Things First". We will continue to strive for partnerships with the State of Arizona to promote opportunities for a great future for our children and youth, stated President Begaye.

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