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## PRESIDENT BEGAYE TO DOI, 'INDIAN WATER RIGHTS SHOULD BE BASED ON NEED, NOT LIABILITY TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'



President Begaye spoke before DOI's tribal consultation telling representatives that Indian water rights settlements should be based on need not liability to U.S. Government.

Phoenix, Ariz.-During a tribal consultation with the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on Sunday, Oct. 9, President Russell Begaye told Deputy Secretary of Interior Mike Connor that the criteria and procedures for Indian Water Rights settlements should be based on the needs of the tribes rather than liability of the United States government.

Representatives from OMB were not present at the consultation.

President Begaye stated that the Navajo Nation had sent a letter to Cecilia Munoz, Director of Domestic Policy, requesting this consultation upon receiving OMB's letter concerning the review process for proposing Indian Water Rights settlements.

"This memorandum could have potentially profound ramifications on the ability of Indian tribes to obtain water rights settlements," President Begaye said. "Yet the memorandum was issued without consultation with tribal officials."

Executive Order 13175 requires federal agencies that promulgate policies that take any action, or might have substantial effect on

Indian tribes, to engage in meaningful government-to-government consultations. This didn't happen before OMB issued their memorandum.

"In our letter, the Navajo Nation respectfully requested the memorandum be withdrawn and for meaningful consultation to start immediately," he said. "We believe that consultation must include, not only OMB, but also DOI."

By issuing the memo without consultation, the federal government is creating an adverse relationship between the tribes and the United States.

"The relationship should be based on the trust responsibility to secure the needs of the tribes. Instead the criterion is designed to minimize the liability of the United States and to minimize the benefits the tribes receive," President Begaye said.

The president reiterated to the both the representatives from DOI and the gathered tribal leaders that the criteria and procedures should focus on tribal needs for water rights. Funding in the set-

tlements should recognize the failure of the U.S. to develop tribal water infrastructure, he said.

“Congress has set a goal that every Indian home should have running water,” President Begaye said. “The goal should be for tribes to have drinking water infrastructure on par with non-Indian communities.”

Many of the tribal leaders present supported President Begaye’s state-

ments and referred to them in their own statements.

In closing, President Begaye said the Navajo Nation and all Indian Tribes want to be partners with the federal government and not adversaries in formulating the criteria and procedures that guide Indian Water Settlements.

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