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PRESIDENT BEGAYE TELLS TRUMP ADMINISTRATION THAT INDIAN TRIBES NEED TO OWN TRIBAL LAND



During the Winter Legislative COLT meeting, President Russell Begaye focused on tribal land and mineral rights ownership.

WASHINGTON, D.C.-Speaking directly to President Trump's Intergovernmental Affairs Officer Billy Kirkland, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye said that Indian Tribes need to own their lands to foster economic and infrastructure development.

Kirkland was in attendance on Sunday, Feb. 12, at the Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT) Winter Legislative Meeting held at the Stanley R. Crooks Tribal Leaders Conference Center in Washington D.C.

President Begaye serves as the Chairman of COLT.

"We are constantly being reminded that Indian reservations are federal lands and that they do not belong to us. In a sense, we just lease them," President Begaye said. "I disagree. The Navajo Nation is our land and tribal control over tribal lands needs to be redefined."

Native American tribes must consult with the Department of Interior (DOI) to seek their signatory authority for things like home site

leases, grazing permits and farming usage. In addition, the control that tribes have over their natural resources and mineral rights is extremely limited.

"There is oil being taken from the Navajo Nation of which we get no royalties or benefits, whereas the state is getting 51% of the revenue from this oil. This is wrong," President Begaye said. "In actuality we should have control over our land and minerals without having to get the permission of the Federal government. We should decide on these matters because the Navajo Nation is our land."

President Trump has championed the prioritization of growing national and local economies while bringing businesses back to the United States. For these economic priorities to be fully realized on tribal nations, the concept of sovereignty needs to be federally redefined as it applies to tribes, giving them full power and authority over their lands and laws.

“We are asking this administration to respect our sovereignty. Beyond that, we are asking the administration to work with us in constructing policy that will give us control over our land,” the president said. “This discussion should include those on Capital Hill as well.”

As a liaison between the states and the White House, Kirkland said he wants to ensure that everyone has an advocate or a direct line of communication to the administration. This includes Native American tribes.

“President Trump is really interested in improving economic situations for all people. We believe that infrastructure projects are way to do this,” Kirkland said. “I’m here on behalf of the administration because we want to partner with tribes and have an open dialogue. We know that COLT represents a majority of large Indian tribes. Let us know where the Coalition stands on certain issues.”

President Begaye encouraged Kirkland to continue consulting with COLT as it represents a majority of Indian tribes. He noted that discrepancies exist in accomplishing economic development and infrastructure needs on tribal lands, the majority dealing with sovereignty issues.

“COLT tribes have their own judicial and public safety departments. That’s one of the major differences between COLT and other small-



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er tribes,” he said. “When you speak to COLT, you are speaking to tribes that own most of Indian Country in terms of land.”

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