



## The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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### **President Nez welcomes Dr. Jill Biden and health industry leaders to the first cancer treatment center in Indian Country**



**PHOTO:** Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez, former U.S. Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden, and health industry leaders at the House of Hope in Tuba City, Ariz. on May, 22, 2019.

**TUBA CITY, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelia Nez had the honor of welcoming former U.S. First Lady Dr. Jill Biden and healthy industry leaders from across the country to the Navajo community of Tuba City, to view the ongoing development of the very first cancer treatment center on the Navajo Nation and all of Indian Country.

The Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation has worked for several years to forge new partnerships with universities, health care companies, and health industry professionals to garner support for the cancer treatment center to provide chemotherapy, support groups, and other much needed services for Navajo people who suffer from various types of cancer.

“The Navajo Nation was honored to welcome former Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden, the Cancer Support Community, and many healthy industry leaders and professionals to the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation in support of the very first cancer treatment center in Indian Country. Working together through strong partnerships is key to providing these much-needed services for our Diné people who require cancer treatment. On behalf of the Nez-Lizer Administration, we thank everyone for supporting this initiative,” said President Nez.

He also thanked Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation CEO Lynette Bonar, RN, MBA, and its board members for taking on the challenge and leading the way. TCRHCC Board of Directors President Christopher Curley also thanked President Nez and Dr. Biden for supporting the efforts.

The group visited the cancer treatment center, which will soon open to help cancer patients that currently have to travel hundreds of miles to Flagstaff to receive treatment. President Nez noted that many Navajo cancer patients are required to receive treatments several times a month, but often lack the resources to travel long distances. Due to these circumstances, many patients do not receive the adequate treatment they need.

During a presentation to the group, President Nez provided a historical overview of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation that led to a dramatic increase in cancer rates. Today, there remains over 500 abandoned uranium mines across the Navajo Nation that await clean-up by the federal government, however due to limited resources those efforts have been slow and insufficient.

“Prior to uranium mining, Navajo people were virtually cancer-free with the lowest lung cancer rate of all Native American nations. Today, cancer is the second leading cause of mortality among the Navajo people. Cancer rates doubled on the Navajo Nation from the 1970’s to the 1990’s,” stated President Nez. “The federal government has provided the Superfund to clean up the open mines, yet the resources are limited compared to the actual number of abandoned mines.”

TCRHCC CEO Lynette Bonar said the initial start-up costs were funded by the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation and the Cancer Support Community. She said the center is in need of additional equipment to make the facility fully-functional to begin providing full-time treatment. Other partnering organizations include the Barbara Bradley Baekgaard Family Foundation, Biden Cancer Initiative, Eisai, Merck, and Pfizer.

The group also toured the “House of Hope” located in a neighborhood near the cancer treatment center, which was recently renovated by TCRHCC to serve as the site for cancer patients to meet to offer support for one another.

“We have the ability within ourselves to overcome so many obstacles in life and that’s what this collaborative effort is about. By working together, we can develop this cancer treatment site along with many more on the Navajo Nation. I am very grateful to Dr. Jill Biden and all of the partners for being with us today,” stated President Nez.

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