



May 30, 2015  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

President Begaye, Vice President Nez address San Juan County fire protection services



Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez said Navajo citizens residing within San Juan County boundaries deserve the same fire protection services as the rest of the county. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.— Earlier this week, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez met with representatives from San Juan County regarding the fire protection services provided for the Navajo chapters located within the county boundaries. It was a follow up discussion to last week’s initial meeting between the Navajo Nation and San Juan County, which was organized by county commissioner Wallace Charley to address the loss of fire defense services from the county to the Navajo Nation on Sept. 1, 2015. Other tribal officials in attendance included tribal corrections director Delores Greyyeyes from the Navajo

Division of Public Safety, attorney Regina Holyan from Navajo Department of Justice and Navajo Nation Fire Chief Larry Chee. President Begaye said, “There is a shortage of funds to enable our Navajo Nation Fire Department to take over the response and we are exploring temporary options with the county to continue adequate response and protection to these locations.” Temporary options include the transfer of needed equipment from the county to the tribe and mutual aid response with the county for which the tribe would reimburse the county for each emergency fire response. “We will plan on a more

permanent possibility for next fiscal year,” he added. The affected Navajo chapters located within county lines include Newcomb, Ojo Amarillo and Shiprock. From the perspective of a former county supervisor, Vice President Nez said the economic benefit Navajo citizens provide the county through the purchase of goods and services is undeniable. “The myth is that Navajos don’t pay taxes,” Vice President Nez said. “Navajos visit the border towns and infuse millions of dollars. “We need to remind the commission that if it wasn’t for the economic power of Navajos, the county budget crisis would be worse than it is,” he said. Although deadlines set by the county expired under the previous administration, President Begaye and Vice

with the Navajo Nation and the commissioners need to protect all of their constituents within the county. “When I was a county supervisor, my job was to advocate for the citizens who voted me into office, including tribal members who were both county and Navajo Nation citizens. I advocated to provide services for their communities,” Vice President Nez said. The fire tax appropriation is based on statistics for fire services, including the calls for assistance on the Navajo Nation. To say the county tax base decreased and the need to cut services for tribal communities is not only unfair, but also illogical, President Begaye said. “These are critical services,” President Begaye said. “Our people go to Farmington and shop, paying taxes in the process. Those taxes benefit the county,

**“If it wasn’t for the economic power of Navajos, the county budget crisis would be worse than it is.”**

President Nez reminded the county of the dire situation facing tribal members, who are also residents of San Juan County in need of fire defense. “San Juan County receives taxes to benefit the entire county, including residents that reside on the Navajo Nation. We need more advocacy from our commissioners to ensure these Navajo people have fire protection services,” said President Begaye. He said the county must work

including the fire tax. Quite a number of our people also own homes and pay property taxes. “The county must take that into consideration,” he added.

