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THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO STOP TREATING TRIBES AS PROGRAMS



President Russell Begaye was interviewed by Cronkite News after the NCAI State of Indian Nations address. The president said he had hoped to hear more about land reform, mineral rights and empowering tribal nations to have jurisdiction over non-Indians who commit crimes on tribal lands.

WASHINGTON, D.C.-In listening to the State of Indian Nations (SOIT) address given by National Congress of American Indian (NCAI) President Brian Cladoosby, President Russell Begaye said it's time that tribal nations stop being treated as programs by the Federal Government.

"We need to be treated as any other nation around the world would be treated," he said.

NCAI President Cladoosby delivered the address at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., on Monday, Feb. 13. His address was followed by a response from Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Chairman John Hoeven (R-ND).

The president said he questioned many of the ideas expressed in the address. More over, he said the Federal Government needs to live up to its responsibility in maintaining a government-to-government relationship with tribal nations.

Regarding mineral rights on tribal lands, the SOIT address didn't promote the need for tribes to have exclusive rights over their min-

erals. In his speech, Cladoosby did note the disparity that exists in getting leases or licenses on reservations as opposed to off-reservation, stating that the times are lengthier on Indian reservations.

"We heard about how we can better these processes through federal collaboration," President Begaye said. "But that is our responsibility and shouldn't be put under the authority of the Federal government."

When the Federal Government gives tribal nations full authority over their mineral rights, tribes will shorten the processes for themselves, he said.

"In this case, the Feds want to shorten timeframes and regulate our mineral rights while still advising us on the best way to utilize our natural resources," President Begaye said.

The Federal Government needs to empower tribal nations to have full jurisdiction over any person who commits crimes on tribal lands. The president said that members of Congress and the Federal government are afraid to give this right to tribes.

“That is why the Violence Against Women Act and the Tribal Law and Order Act were voted against by Congress,” President Begaye said. “These Acts give us authority over non-Indians who commit crimes on our nations and the Federal Government is protective of their desire to control Indian nations.”

The process by which the Federal Government funds services to Indian nations through existing programs isn’t beneficial. When the Federal Government provides block grants to other nations, these nations can use the grants for specific purposes. The difference being that international nations have control over how they fund programs.

“What we heard today is that the Federal Government will continue to regulate how Indian nations expend their funding in the same way that they regulate programs. Tribes are not programs, they are sovereign nations and funding should be applied accordingly,” President Begaye said. “We heard that IHS funds are being reverted back. Nations that receive money from the United States government don’t ever have to revert funds. That is how nation-to-na-

tion relationships work.”

President Begaye was also discouraged to not hear anything about land reform, which he sees as being an obstacle to establishing business, building economies and providing opportunities for tribal nations to utilize their lands.

“Why should we ask permission from the Secretary of Interior to grant a home site lease, business lease or a farming or grazing permit to our own tribal members?” President Begaye asked. “We should have complete control over our lands and we do not. I didn’t hear this mentioned in the address.”

Indian nations need the ability to grow their economies, employ their tribal members and strengthen tribal governmental services.

“We are still acting like programs under the Federal Government and we shouldn’t have that attitude,” the president said. “It’s time we act as nations.”

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