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First Lady Biden concludes visit to the Navajo Nation with discussions with students, educators, parents, and health care workers

PHOTO: First Lady, Dr. Jill Biden, speaks to Navajo students at Hunters Point Boarding School in St. Michaels, Ariz. on April 23, 2021.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On the second day of her visit to the Navajo Nation on Friday, First Lady, Dr. Jill Biden, joined Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelia Nez for a visit to Hunters Point Boarding School where they met with Navajo students, parents, and educators to discuss their personal challenges and success stories during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Hunters Point Boarding School Principal Julia Donald, Department of Diné Education Acting Superintendent Dr. Patricia Gonnie, and Navajo Nation Board of Education Vice President Spencer Willie also greeted Dr. Biden upon her arrival.

Dr. Biden was joined by President Nez and First Lady Nez as she spoke with Chinle High School senior Namioka Rain Honie, Kin Dah Lichi’i Oltta sixth grader Rakal Nez, Navajo Preparatory School
senior Cade Allison and ninth grader Aurelius Yazzie, and Wingate High School senior Jewels Leslie regarding the challenges they faced during the pandemic. The students spoke about the challenges of adjusting to virtual learning when schools stopped in-person instruction at the start of the pandemic, which included very limited broadband access and the emotional toll of having to suddenly isolate from friends and relatives.

“As mothers, we hold all children very close to our heart. By listening to the personal experiences of the students today and having that personal dialogue with them, I strongly believe that First Lady Biden inspired them to achieve more through higher education and beyond. Mental health is a great concern for everyone during this pandemic and having an opportunity for our young people to converse with the First Lady of the United States, who is also a mother and a school teacher, shows her commitment to our students and educators. We had a wonderful discussion and now the First Lady has plenty of great insight from our students to take back to Washington D.C.,” said First Lady Nez.

Navajo Preparatory School Diné language teacher Lesley Tohtsoni and Wingate High School English teacher Melody West were also part of the discussion, to share their perspectives in dealing with the challenges presented by COVID-19.

“The conversation that Dr. Biden had with our young students was very heartfelt and she certainly offered her compassion for them. Having that one-on-one dialogue with each student, parent, and teacher was very uplifting and I think it also provides the students with some relief to talk about the challenges they are dealing with in the midst of this pandemic. As a teacher and a parent, First Lady Biden understands the difficulties that many of our young people are striving to overcome in order to achieve more in life. I was very proud of all of the students for sharing their stories and representing all of our youth very well,” said President Nez.

Following the visit to Hunters Point Boarding School, the group traveled to Tséhootsooí Medical Center in Fort Defiance, Ariz. where they met with Dr. Sandi Adkins, who is the CEO of the health care facility, and several frontline health care workers. They were joined by Health, Education, and Human Services Committee chair Daniel Tso, Navajo Department of Health Executive Director Dr. Jill Jim, and Navajo Area Indian Health Service Director Roselyn Tso.

President Nez highlighted the hard work and commitment of all health care workers across the Navajo Nation that led the way in the Navajo Nation’s approach in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic last year.

PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, First Lady Phefelia Nez, and First Lady Dr. Jill Biden with Tséhootsooí Medical Center health care workers in Fort Defiance, Ariz. on April 23, 2021.
“It’s because of our frontline warriors that the Navajo Nation is now a model for mitigating and pushing back on COVID-19 in an effective way that has saved many lives. Well over half of the adult population on the Navajo Nation have been fully vaccinated. By having the First Lady of the United States here at one of our health care facilities demonstrates the Biden-Harris Administration’s commitment to the Navajo Nation and all of our health care workers. This pandemic is not over and we have to continue to push back on the virus. We look forward to working together with President Biden, First Lady Dr. Biden, and all of their cabinet members as we continue to overcome the pandemic day by day,” stated President Nez.

This marked the third visit to the Navajo Nation by Dr. Biden in recent years, and her first official visit as the First Lady of the United States. President Nez thanked First Lady Biden and added that he is optimistic that her visit lays the groundwork for President Biden to visit the Navajo Nation.

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