



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

CONTACTS:

Jared Touchin, Communications Director
(928) 274-4275

Crystalyne Curley, Sr. Public Information Officer
(928) 274-2758

nnopvp.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 17, 2021

President and First Lady Nez address federal policies during the White House Tribal Nations Summit

WASHINGTON D.C. – On Tuesday, during the final day of the White House Tribal Nations Summit, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelia Nez spoke about the COVID-19 pandemic on the Navajo Nation and the opportunities to change federal policies to help advance infrastructure improvements for water, electricity, broadband, roads, housing, and a new Executive Order to support missing persons initiatives.



PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelia Nez on the opening day of the White House Tribal Nations Summit in Washington D.C. on Nov. 15, 2021.

“In 2019, a modern-day monster known as COVID-19 entered our communities — impacting the lives of many of our elders, our children, frontline warriors, and many others throughout the world. The onset of COVID-19 forced us to close our schools, government offices, and it magnified the lack of basic infrastructure on the Navajo Nation and all tribal communities. Some of you may have seen photos of our Navajo children with their grandparents on hills and mountains with their laptops in order to gain access to the internet so they could participate in virtual learning. Unfortunately, these situations were all too common across,” said President Nez.

Last year, the Navajo Nation received \$714 million in CARES Act funds, which allowed over 700 Navajo families to receive electricity, over 300 off-grid solar installations, 117 water and waste water upgrades and replacements, 105 water cistern system installations, 30 waterline connections to homes, 139 broadband installations and upgrades, and four new broadband/cell phone towers. Approximately half of the \$714 million was distributed to the Navajo people in the form of hardship assistance. President Nez pointed out that more long-term improvements could have been completed using CARES Act funds, if not for the initial deadline of December 2020 and the federal requirements and clearances needed to advance more projects.

The Navajo Nation is expected to receive additional funds from the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Bill that was signed into law on Monday, by President Biden. President Nez joined President Biden,

Vice President Harris, their cabinet members, and Congressional members for the signing of the Infrastructure Bill at the White House where he also spoke with U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and other high level officials regarding infrastructure development.

“While funding is made possible, we need to address the burdensome red tape that exists. Federal laws and regulations continue to stall projects. For example, to construct a BIA highway or bridge, the Navajo Nation has to secure environmental compliances from both the BIA and Federal Highway Administration. Why should Tribes have to secure two environmental compliances from two different agencies? Federal Agencies need to work with one another to create processes that require one approval. We urge this Administration to cut the red tape by streamlining federal processes through secretarial orders or by amending federal regulations to lessen the administrative burden placed on tribes. Failure to clear out some of the burdens that prevent infrastructure investment will mean all our efforts to help pass the Infrastructure Bill may not lead to the progress we want for our people,” added President Nez.

With the American Rescue Plan Act funds, the Nez-Lizer Administration presented a plan that would provide at least \$780 million for water, powerlines, broadband, housing, and bathroom additions, \$350 million for direct services in communities related to education, health care, mental health, social services, detox centers, senior centers, economic development, and tourism. \$220 million would be allocated for chapter projects and \$100 million for enterprises. Approximately \$207 million has already been approved for another round of hardship assistance for enrolled members of the Navajo Nation.

During the summit, First Lady Nez also had the opportunity to thank President Biden, First Lady Dr. Jill Biden, and Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland for supporting an Executive Order issued on Monday, directing federal officials to work hand in hand with Tribal Nations and Tribal partners to build safe and healthy Tribal communities and to support comprehensive law enforcement, prevention, intervention, and support services to help address missing and murdered Indigenous people.

“On behalf of the Navajo Nation Office of the First Lady and Second Lady, we are committed to restoring unity, healing, and the well-being of our Navajo children, women, elders, and families. As mothers and leaders, we continue to raise awareness to focus areas that impact our Navajo families, including childhood development and education, culture preservation, health and wellness, parenting, reducing trauma of children and women, behavioral and mental health issues, violence against women and children, and many others. With increased awareness, resources, and network building, we are confident that many issues will be addressed with the Biden-Harris Administration, and look forward to working together,” said First Lady Nez.

“We thank President Biden and Vice President Harris for restoring the tribal nations summit and providing a seat at the table for our people. Our voices are being heard and we will continue to work with federal officials to Build Back Better and ensure that funding benefits our people in the short-term and long-term as we move forward together,” stated President Nez.

###

For the latest news from the Office of the President and Vice President, please visit <http://www.opvp.navajo-nsn.gov/> or find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.