



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 26, 2021

Vice President Lizer highlights the importance of partnerships to increase broadband connectivity on the Navajo Nation



FARMINGTON, N.M. – Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer was joined by 24th Navajo Nation Council Delegate Carl Slater, Navajo Nation Division of General Services Executive Director Tom Platero, and Navajo Nation Telecommunication Regulatory Commissioners during the “2021 Navajo Nation Broadband Roundtable – A Series of Roundtable Discussions to Advance Broadband Policy and Practices” on Tuesday, at San Juan College in Farmington, N.M., to discuss the expansion of broadband connectivity in rural areas of the Navajo Nation.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the need for broadband connectivity to meet the needs of our students, teachers, first responders, health care professionals, elders, and business owners. Broadband on the Nation lags in speed, reliability, and available connections. Rural broadband connectivity needs to be taken seriously, like roads and water. With the American Rescue Plan Act funds, the Nez-Lizer Administration is proposing to use \$200 million for more broadband infrastructure development for our communities because the widening digital divide is a crisis deserving a response,” said Vice President Lizer.

During the discussion, several telecommunications companies, tribal organizations, and local governments, including Emery Telcom, Verizon, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority – Choice Wireless, Sacred Wind Communications, Frontier Communications, Cellular One, Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education, Navajo Technical University, Diné College, Four Corners Economic Development, Apache County, and the Dineh Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the challenges of broadband connectivity, such as funding, jurisdictional issues, right-of-way approval processes, federal regulations, and the lack of partnerships and collaborations.

“Too often, we operate in silos, whether it’s the government, private industries, or local communities, which hinders a collaborative direction. This convening of the key telecommunication partners and professionals at the roundtable, away from a political environment, offers an opportunity for meaningful growth and development to get our people the services they deserve,” said Delegate Slater.

On Oct. 15, the Nez-Lizer Administration presented a proposal to the Navajo Nation Council seeking support to allocate \$200 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds for broadband connectivity throughout the Navajo Nation.

In addition, under the leadership of Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission Office Executive Director Christopher Becenti, the Administration has prioritized the Navajo Nation’s efforts to increase telecommunications infrastructure and to secure additional spectrum capacity through the Federal Communications Commission.

In February, the Nez-Lizer Administration successfully secured \$53 million in funding through the Federal Communications Commission’s E-Rate Program, to install over 600 miles of fiber optic lines that will expand internet capacity on the Navajo Nation. The historic achievement took years of coordination and planning. Through the coordination and persistence of many partners, the Nez-Lizer Administration resolved long standing issues that stemmed from previous administrations that stood in the way of progress and allowed the E-Rate Program to finally proceed.

“Recently, through the CARES Act funds, the Navajo Nation increased cell phone and internet access to Navajo families, students, and first responders in various locations, and we plan to do more with the Fiscal Recovery Funds. Navajo communities shouldn’t face major barriers to access high-speed broadband that is essential for staying informed about the public health crisis, accessing economic opportunities, ensuring students can learn, and ensuring citizens can get public safety responses. Without modern internet connection, we can’t move forward,” added Vice President Lizer.

The Nez-Lizer Administration thanks Four Corners Economic Development, Inc., Dineh Chamber of Commerce, the Farmington Chamber of Commerce, and San Juan College for hosting the roundtable discussion.

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