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Navajo leaders welcome N.M. Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham to the Navajo Nation



PHOTO: New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham visited the Navajo communities of Churchrock, Pinedale, Smith Lake, and Crownpoint, N.M on Dec. 16, 2019 to discuss priorities, issues, and concerns of local Navajo leadership.

CHURCHROCK, N.M. – Dec. 17, 2019 – On Monday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Speaker Seth Damon of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne, and Navajo Nation Council Delegates had the honor of welcoming N.M. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham to the Navajo communities of Churchrock, Pinedale, Smith Lake, and Crownpoint, N.M to discuss priorities and concerns of the Navajo Nation.

The discussions related to economic development, infrastructure, health, water development, local governance, education, public safety, and telecommunications.

During the first site visit at the Rhino nitrile glove manufacturing facility in Churchrock, President Nez, Chief Justice Jayne, and Council Delegates Edmund Yazzie and Wilson Stewart, Jr., spoke

about the importance of strengthening the long-term partnerships between the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico to improve the lives of Navajo citizens.

“We are honored to welcome Governor Lujan Grisham to the Navajo Nation to hear directly from tribal and local leadership, and Navajo citizens. The Governor’s visit allows the Nation to share its’ priorities and challenges with her administration. We commend the Governor’s Office for working closely with the Nation and honoring government-to-government partnerships,” said President Nez. “The Nez-Lizer Administration had several meetings with the Governor in support of the renewable energy initiative and Capital Outlay Funds.”

“The Navajo Nation has a great partner in Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. We appreciate the

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initiative of the governor's office in coming to our local communities to witness not only the concerns and issues that face our people, but the progress that has been made through state partnerships. We look forward to working together on Navajo priorities and initiatives for the coming years," said Speaker Damon.

The District 6 Council chapters, Pinedale Chapter, and Smith Lake Chapter officials and community members also had the opportunity to share community needs and resources related to youth, elders, health, economic development, and road improvements. District 6 Council chapters include Baahaali, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh, and Tselichii.

Chief Justice Jayne shared the need for collaboration with the state regarding customary tribal adoption and how having a reliable justice system is essential for economic development.

"We want to be able to attract businesses so they can have confidence when they come to Navajo to say, 'There is a strong court there, and if we need to use their court system, it will be strong, and it will be just.' The mainstay of economic development is a just court system, and that is what the Navajo Nation has," said Chief Justice Jayne.

Navajo Nation leadership stated that the nation seeks support to provide a renewable water supply to sustain communities and future economic growth. Approximately 30 to 40% of Navajo residents have no water connections in the Navajo Nation, and it presents health disparities, according to the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources.

The Navajo Nation also shared with the governor its health initiatives, which include senior services, intergenerational teachings, behavioral and mental health, and the war on diabetes. The visit also included a presentation on the new Gallup Indian Medical Center, which is a 99-bed facility that will serve the community of Gallup and surrounding Navajo communities. Navajo leaders stated they continue to work with federal leadership to allocate and appropriate funds to begin construction within a Navajo community.

In Crownpoint, Gov. Lujan Grisham visited Navajo Technical University, where President Nez, NTU President Dr. Elmer Guy, and Council Delegates Daniel Tso, Jamie Henio, Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Mark Freeland, Edmund Yazzie, Eugenia

Charles-Newton, and Wilson Stewart, Jr., sought educational support for Navajo students, including scholarship and student loan repayment services and resources.

President Nez shared his support for Legislation No. 0238-19, which was developed in coordination with the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President, that will set aside \$50 million from the Navajo Nation Sihásin Fund to establish an endowment aimed at creating more scholarship opportunities for Navajo students.

During the meeting, Gov. Lujan Grisham also announced the New Mexico Free Education Initiative, which proposes to establish a tuition-free program to assist first-year college students in the State of New Mexico.

Gov. Lujan Grisham next visited the Crownpoint Justice Center, where members of the Law and Order Committee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety Executive Director Jesse Delmar, Chief of Police Philip Francisco, and Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission Executive Director Christopher Becenti emphasized the need for cross-commissioning, broadband, and rural addressing to ensure the safety of Navajo citizens, and recognizing the impact of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas on the Nation.

"Strengthening state and tribal partnerships has been a top priority of my administration since day one. We must validate and honor and improve our government-to-government relationships. I am always honored to spend time with Navajo leadership and the Navajo people, and I greatly appreciate my visit and many more to come," said Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Also in attendance during the site visits were N.M. Indian Affairs Department Secretary Lynn Trujillo, Navajo Nation Department of Health Executive Director Dr. Jill Jim, Navajo Nation Division of Human Resources Dr. Perphelia Fowler, and Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources Executive Director Dr. Rudy Shebala.

"On behalf of the Navajo Nation, we express our appreciation to Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and Secretary Lynn Trujillo for visiting the Navajo Nation to hear the issues and concerns of the Nation and how we can collaboratively address them. We look forward to the next visit," said President Nez.

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