

Governor Lujan Grisham visits four Navajo communities

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CHURCHROCK, N.M. –Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez welcome New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham to the Navajo communities of Churchrock, Pinedale, Smith Lake, and Crownpoint Dec. 16 to discuss priorities and concerns of the Navajo Nation. She was also greeted by Speaker Seth Damon of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne, and Navajo Nation Council delegates.

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

At the first site visit at the Rhino nitrile glove manufacturing facility in Churchrock, the governor heard about the importance of strengthening the longterm partnerships between the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico to improve the lives of Navajo citizens.

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.

Jayne shared the need for collaboration with the state regarding customary tribal adoption. She also emphasized the importance of a reliable justice system for economic development.

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“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,” Jayne said.

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 the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources says this presents health disparities.

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, 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, Lujan Grisham visited Navajo Technical University, where Navajo leaders seek educational support for Navajo students, including scholarship and student loan repayment services and resources.

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. It will set aside \$50 million from the Navajo Nation Síhásin Fund to establish an endowment aimed at creating more scholarship opportunities for Navajo students.

During the meeting, 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.

Lujan Grisham visited the Crownpoint Justice Center, where members emphasized the need for cross-commissioning, broadband, and rural addressing to ensure the safety of Navajo citizens,

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and recognize 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,” Lujan Grisham said.