

President speaks in support of Economic Development

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Shares his vision of sovereignty via networking at RES 2016

LAS VEGAS, NV – In building Native American economies, tribes need to embrace their identity as nations, not minorities or federal programs, and be recognized as such by the federal government said President Russell Begaye during his keynote address at the American Indian Enterprise luncheon.

The luncheon took place last March 29 at The Mirage Casino and Hotel in Las Vegas, N.M. and was held in coordination with the 2016 Reservation Economic Summit.

The president's keynote address hit on several key issues affecting economic development within tribal lands. He strongly addressed politicians holding tribal enterprise board positions, telling politicians they should step down from these positions and make room for qualified tribal members.

"We need to separate politics from business, or business from politics," Begaye said. "We need professional experts to serve on tribal enterprise boards on Indian Nations. Politicians often complain and fire first class CEOs. If you are one of those guys, get off that board and let a young professional person be on the board. I guarantee that company will take off with that person's expertise."

Begaye mentioned the Navajo Nation has 13 enterprises and corporations whose board membership will be comprised of professional experts in relevant fields.

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He spoke to a room full of about 600 attendees underscoring the government-to-government relationships that exist between Indian tribes and the federal government and not state or county governments.

The president addressed concerns over how states are trying to control Indian Gaming and impose dual taxation on non-Indian owned businesses operating on Indian lands.

In this, he said, states are attempting to diminish the sovereign inherent rights of Indian tribes.

“We’ve signed treaties. We have a government-to-government relationship with the United States,” he said. “Today the states are trying to take control of Indian gaming. We are saying, ‘Hands off!’ We didn’t sign treaties with states but with the federal government.”

Regarding dual taxation, the president said states are “killing the economy on the reservations.”

“States should never tax companies on our nations because we are sovereign,” he said. “States want jurisdiction to tax non-Indian business on the reservation. That is wrong.”

In his address, Begaye reinforced the need for tribes to partner in making known to each other what types of businesses and services they can offer. He said that 80 percent of the contracts he signs go to non-Indian businesses.

“I should be able to pick up the phone and call a (Native-owned) business and say, ‘Can you do this job? I’m ready to send you some money because you’re a Native-owned business,’ he said. “We need to value each other’s businesses. We need to learn how to partner in a strategic manner.”

Anthony Edwardsen, President and CEO with Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation (UIC), noted

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Begaye's push for inter-tribal business networking and met with executive staff to discuss any possible partnerships that the two tribes could pursue.

"We were deeply inspired by President's Begaye's keynote address, in which he promoted Native partnerships," he said. «As tribes we need to engage in more of these partnerships because it's important that we establish these relationships."

Established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971, UIC has since been very successful and strategic in establishing a family of companies that encompass designing and building, oil and gas, sand and gravel and government services.

As a federally recognized corporation, UIC has economic strength and are committed to hiring tribal members, Edwardsen said.

"We truly want to start a relationship and partnership with the Navajo," he said to President Begaye. "We don't want to be left behind."

Begaye and members of executive staff also met with the Novello Corporation and Navajo Transitional Energy Company to discuss the possibilities of converting natural gas to gasoline. The company proposed the Nation fund the feasibility and engineering studies, while Novello Corporation through private equity investments would proceed with the capital project based on results of the feasibility and engineering studies. The Nation prefers an asymmetric risk-reward approach to investing in projects.

Representatives from the Novello corporation have developed technology facilitating this process and said it's an alternative to utilizing crude oil while moving away from drilling methods like hydraulic fracking.

The president also met with representatives from Horton Construction Solutions (HCS), a division of DR Horton, to discuss possible partnerships in moving forward to provide adequate housing to communities across the Nation. DR Horton is the largest home builder in the U.S.

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Co-founder of HCS, Terry Horton said HCS provides the most efficient residential construction methods through utilizing advanced building systems and providing it at an affordable cost. Horton said HCS strives to obtain the utmost in energy efficiency, sustainability, while offering the lowest carbon footprint of any construction methods in the marketplace. This opportunity has the potential to create manufacturing, truckload deliver drivers, site assembly, and administrative jobs.

Begaye's attendance at 2016 RES highlighted critical networking among tribal and non-tribal entities with the underlying purpose of moving the Nation forward in both economic development and partnerships addressing issues of housing, natural resource development and inter-tribal business relationships.

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