

Begaye promotes diversification of Navajo Economy at RES 2017

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LAS VEGAS, NV – In addressing tribal economic diversification, President Russell Begaye said the Navajo Nation needs to move away from coal and oil based revenue generation while addressing infrastructure needs, workforce development and expediting processes for business development.

“The Navajo Nation is at a critical point where it must diversify its revenue sources away from the coal and oil industry,” Begaye said.

The president said the Navajo Nation’s revenue from coal and oil has fallen from 77 percent down to 66 percent. The nation foresees this dropping 20 percent more if Navajo Generating Station shuts down in 2019.

Begaye spoke on Mar. 14, at the 2017 National Reservation Economic Summit during a breakout session titled “Diversification – Expanding Beyond Single Revenue Sources.” The Summit is being held at the Mirage hotel from Mar. 13-16.

The president acknowledged the history that tribal nations have had in dealing with the federal

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government but also noted that tribes have persisted to grow in spite of adversity. He said tribal nations could benefit from pursuing projects that are in line with federal priority.

“We have to make up our mind that we, as Indian nations, will connect with the presidential administration by any means possible to have them address our concerns,” he said. “The Navajo Nation has been able to meet with the transition teams and we are talking with the Secretaries to address issues we want pushed at a federal level. This is our responsibility as tribal leaders.”

Panelists spoke about tribal nations being overly dependent on single sources of economic activity and the need for them to develop diversified business communities on their lands.

The Navajo Nation derives its main revenue sources from business taxes, coal and oil royalties, and business site leases. The president addressed several fundamental building blocks that need to be put in place to foster business development.

“Infrastructure issues like water, wastewater, electric utility, roads, transportation and fiber infrastructure are fundamental building blocks that must be in place for community and business development to occur,” Begaye said. “We need an expedited land withdrawal process for business site leasing through tribal and federal processes.”

Begaye spoke about the need for tribal nations to develop business infrastructure through leveraging their dollars and utilizing federal exempt tax bonds.

“We need banks and investors to be willing to work with tribes in diversifying our revenue sources,” he said.

The president also addressed issues of housing, the obstacle of dual taxation on tribal lands and how public safety affects diversifying economies on tribal lands. Begaye also reinforced the importance of tribes working with their respective tribal councils to address beneficial legislative issues.

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“Sometimes you only need to tweak one of your tribal statutes to make laws friendlier to our tribal entrepreneurs,” he said. “We need to maintain stability, continuity and economic growth on tribal lands and we can do it through diversifying our economies.”