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OPVP PROTECT CHACO CANYON REGION THROUGH COLLABORATION WITH ALL PUEBLO COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS

ALBUQUERQUE – On Feb. 23, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez joined forces with the All Pueblo Council of Governors against fracking and horizontal drilling in the Chaco Canyon region.

“We are descendants from the Chaco Canyon area. We are connected to these lands spiritually. The voices of our ancestors live in this area and any disturbance to this area is culturally and morally insensitive,” said President Begaye.

Whether or not tribal leaders are appointed or voted into office, they have the responsibility to protect tribal nations, resources, and sacred sites, he said.

The greater Chaco landscape as designated by the Bureau of Land Management includes the Chaco Culture National Historical Park and numerous sites along the great north road, a Chacoan road north of the national historical park. For the Navajo Nation, these Chacoan roads are sacred sites and traditional cultural property.

The Navajo people are descendants of the Anasazi from the Chaco Canyon region.

Today, these sacred lands rich with archaeological resources are at risk of the negative impacts related to drilling and fracking.

Vice President Nez said the Navajo people carry the overwhelming burden of the uranium mining legacy: contaminated water sources, former uranium miners and their families dying from terminal illnesses, lack of cleanup at more than 500 abandoned uranium mines, and lack of adequate compensation from the federal government and private mining industry.

His fear is that fracking will be another environmental issue that future generations of Navajos will have to cleanup.

“Studies show that fracking is contaminating our water. Our people know that water is life and we can ill afford to contaminate these water sources in the name of oil,” said Vice President Nez.

Vice President noted that when fracking occurs and causes underground explosions, the impacts can be vast.



President Russell Begaye stands with Governors from the All Pueblo Council of Governors. The historic meeting was the first time the Navajo Nation and the APCG came together to collaborate on a critical issue.



President Russell Begaye said that he will continue to advocate for the protection of the Chaco Canyon area.

The Navajo Nation also supports House Memorial 70, sponsored by Rep. Derrick L. Lente (D-Dist. 65). This bill reaffirms New Mexico’s commitment to protecting and preserving tribal, cultural and historical sites and resources in the Chaco Canyon area.

Rep. Lente is requesting proper government-to-government consultation from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs for Chaco Canyon.

“We will continue to advocate and lobby for the protection of the Chaco Canyon area,” said President Begaye.

A letter to the BLM from President Begaye and Vice President Nez

stated concerns and impacts on increased drilling near Chaco Cultural National Historic Park.

Increased surface activities from drilling is interrupting the daily lives of the Navajo people who live near Chaco Canyon. These communities include Counselor, Nageezi, Torreon, and Ojo Encino.

“We have to protect our land, water and air quality; many of our relatives are getting sick. At the grassroots level, we are linking up with other environmental groups to fight for proper tribal consultation,” said Samuel Sage from Counselor, N.M.

The meeting with the Pueblo Council was the first of its kind. President and Vice President look forward to continuing relations with the 19 N.M. Pueblos.

“This is a historic meeting between sovereign Pueblo governments and the sovereign Navajo Nation government. I’m pleased that President Russell Begaye and Vice-President Jonathan Nez joined with us to talk about how to protect sacred sites including Chaco Canyon. We look forward to more conversations with the Navajo Nation about how we can work together as native people,” said Chairman E. Paul Torres.

Chaco Canyon is one of three U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Sites in N.M.

“I am encouraged to hear that the All Pueblo Council of Governors and Navajo Nation are engaging in a high-level dialogue regarding future oil and gas development near Chaco Culture National Historical Park,” said Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.).

Sen. Udall noted, that by working together, stakeholders can better protect areas of cultural significance in the Chacoan landscape in a responsible manner.

Before concluding the meeting, a work group was created to address fracking within the Chaco Canyon area. Gov. Mark Mitchell of Tesuque Pueblo was chosen to lead the group, which will include



During the meeting with the APCG, Vice President Jonathan Nez talked about how fracking can cause underground explosions which can contaminate water sources.

the Navajo Nation.

HM 70 is scheduled for the House State Government, Indian & Veterans Affairs Committee on Feb. 28.

The Pueblo Council is comprised of one tribal leader or representative from all 19 Pueblos of N.M. and one Pueblo from Texas.

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