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President Begaye, Vice President Nez Meet with Sen. Udall on Gallup Detox Center



GALLUP, N.M.—On March 25, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez met with Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., to discuss funding for the Na'nízhoozhí Center Incorporated, also known as the Gallup Detoxification Center. Udall requested the meeting after touring the NCI facility the day before.

President Begaye said the Navajo Nation is looking at partnering with the Rehoboth McKinley County Health Services for treatment services for alcoholism in Gallup as opposed to funding NCI.

“We don’t have issues with a funding partnership with (NCI), we have issues with the effectiveness,” said President Begaye. “We feel that RMCHS has the best program in Gallup.

“They have 30, 60, and 90-day long-term rehab services. I’d rather put monies there because I know that it’s going to work,” he added.

Above from left to right: Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye, Senator Tom Udall, D-N.M., Vice President Jonathan Nez and Acting Executive Director for the Navajo Department of Health, Ramona Antone-Nez.

Below: During the meeting with Sen. Udall, President Begaye said he questioned the effectiveness of detoxification centers and would rather fund treatment services for alcoholism.



NCI provided protective custody, which brought intoxicated individuals to the facility where they were held for up to 72 hours before they were released. This resulted in a “revolving door” effect that saw some of the same individuals at the facility 10 times within a month.

On Oct. 24, 2013, the Navajo Nation and the city of Gallup formally entered into a memorandum of agreement for comprehensive case management at NCI after the facility was closed in June 2013 from lack of funding. The MOA ended on Oct. 1, 2015.

After the agreement concluded, NCI has been in a state of uncertainty because the Navajo Nation was the primary funding source for operation of the detox center. This was further compounded on March 14, when N.M. Gov. Susana Martinez vetoed \$200,000 for NCI that was earmarked for capital outlay funding.

Udall described the situation as a “serious crisis” and explained that earmarks from the federal government are no longer available to fund NCI. He wanted to bring everybody to the table – Navajo Nation, Zuni Tribe, McKinley County, city officials, state lawmakers, and the federal government – to iron out differences and fund NCI to continue services.

“We really need for Navajo and Zuni to be involved. For many years, NCI got \$1.2 million, but they’re no longer getting that. We need to get that kind of support again,” Udall said.

From Dec. 2, 2013 to Oct. 2, 2015, the Navajo Nation, through Indian Health Services Department of Behavioral Health Services 638 contract funding, provided \$2,326,159.11 to the Gallup Detox Center. Additional subsidies through the FY 2015 DBHS funding, provided \$507,648.88 to the detox center from Jan 1 to Oct. 2, 2015.

In comparison, from Nov. 4, 2013 to Oct. 2, 2015, funding from the Liquor Excise Tax amounting to \$103,587.27 was contributed by the city to the operation of the Gallup Detox Center.

Alcoholism in the high desert northwestern community is a vicious cycle. During election season, politicians descend upon the city with plans in hand to solve the “alcohol problem” and exposure deaths that have plagued this area for decades.

However, the political power of the liquor industry has usually blocked efforts to limit liquor licenses and for closure of bars and package liquor establishments. Furthermore, these same bar owners have never sat down at the table to find solutions for the exposure deaths and alcohol related problems drowning the city.

Gallup has a population of 21,678 people and 39 liquor li-



Senator Udall described the need for services like the Gallup Detoxification Center as a serious crisis because federal earmarks can no longer fund NCI.

censes, which equates to 19 liquor establishments per 10,000 people. This stark statistic is higher than most major cities in the U.S.

Vice President Nez said millions of dollars are funneled into the city of Gallup from Navajo patronage, but only a small percentage is being returned in needed services, such as those provided by NCI.

“(The Navajo Nation) put a lot of dollars into NCI. If you look at that facility, it’s been repaired because of the funds that were invested by Navajo. The city and county really need to step up and put more resources into the facility,” he said.

President Begaye agreed and said, “The city should be matching or giving more funding than the Navajo Nation. They’re the lowest contributor, in terms of dollars. Our message to the city of Gallup is that you need to ante up. Much of your economy is based on Navajo dollars anyway.”

The Office of the President and Vice President will be meeting with RMCHS on March 29 to discuss a partnership for long-term rehab services.

Karis Begaye, legal counsel for OPVP, said strengthening enforcement provisions of the liquor license violations and attacking the source of the problem needs to be executed, instead of only focusing on rehabilitation efforts.

“We had a liquor facility in Sanders, Arizona that nearly destroyed the community. It was called Red Barn Liquors,” she said. “After it was shut down, it’s become a different community and people returned home back to their families, but they had to attack the source (of the problem).”

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