

No more trickle-down assistance

Written by By Patricia Lundstrom Guest Columnist
Friday, 08 May 2020 05:28



Pinto beans and sugar are not enough

Friends and colleagues from across the country have contacted me to express their sorrow, pity and concern for the people of the Navajo Nation. They have seen the stories on national media outlets reporting the alarming incidence of COVID-19 cases on and around the Navajo Reservation, third highest in the nation per capita.

I'm pleased to see a growing awareness of the dire straits and economic circumstances of the Navajo people, as the COVID crisis lays bare the many ways in which an entire sovereign nation - residing within the broader U.S. system - has endured a century-and-a-half of neglect and has been relegated to the "bottom of the heap" of the American economy. I, too, saw the news clips about how pinto beans and sugar are being delivered to children and washing stations are being delivered to homes on a reservation where 30 percent of the households still do not have running water. These are important errands of mercy to those suffering under the medical and economic duress of the pandemic. But not enough!

I want to challenge Congress and the President to rise up and do something truly meaningful in support of the Navajo people and all of us in McKinley County.

First: Cut the red tape and delays and move federal dollars into the Indian Health Service to

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build the replacement hospital for the Gallup Indian Medical Center.

Now is the time to cut to the chase and fully fund the long-overdue replacement of the Indian Health Service hospital in Gallup. Why, in an area being hardest hit by the COVID-19 virus, should we have to re-purpose a local high school gymnasium as an emergency overflow hospital? Why do we not have the capacity to serve the people for which this hospital was intended? Why would we not commit - right now - to this project, which would provide the single greatest impact on the economic fortunes of an entire region, at the same time providing the level and quality of health care for which the native people of our community have waited a lifetime?

Second: Appropriate the dollars needed to connect the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project, the most significant water project in the west, to the communities, businesses and homes where it can actually be accessed and used.

Why would you invest over \$1 billion in a public water supply system to serve a region where over one-third of homes did not have running water, but then leave the region high-and-dry without the means to actually connect that water supply to where it can do the most good?

We acknowledge that “every little bit helps,” and the resources trickling down to our businesses and workers and families are helping buffer - in the very short term - the losses so many are sustaining. But this is the time for bold action! Time to push beyond the bureaucratic barriers and the piecemeal efforts and the social band-aids that cause so much of the federal commitment to evaporate, as water running into our high desert sands!

I call on our Representatives in Congress, and our President, whose Native American constituents represent 24 tribal nations and thousands of American citizens of indigenous descent, to do something truly meaningful. Something that will make a difference - now, and for the long term. Cut the red tape and bring us a new Indian Health Service hospital and finish the water supply project - for this generation and generations to come. You can keep the pinto beans and sugar.

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