



For Immediate Release

May 5, 2020

PRESIDENT TRUMP NATIVE AMERICAN ROUNDTABLE GOVERNOR STEPHEN ROE LEWIS PRESS STATEMENT

Today Governor Stephen Roe Lewis represented the Gila River Indian Community at a Native American Roundtable hosted by President Donald J. Trump. Other attendees at the Roundtable were Senator Martha McSally, Governor Doug Ducey and Vice-President Myron Lizer.

At the roundtable President Trump re-signed a proclamation announcing May 5th as “Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives Awareness Day, 2020.” The proclamation calls on federal, state, tribal and local governments to increase awareness of the crisis of missing and murdered American Indians and highlights federal funding and programs and the creation of the Operation Lady Justice Taskforce, a multi-agency taskforce created to coordinate the federal response on missing and murdered Native Americans and Alaska Natives. In June of 2019, the Gila River Indian Community hosted the first Department of the Interior listening session on safe communities which led to the creation of the Operation Lady Justice Taskforce.

Governor Lewis commended the President for signing the proclamation and bringing continued attention to the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People.

The President also discussed COVID-19-related issues with the tribal leaders including testing, personal protective equipment, ventilators and other supplies. Governor Lewis thanked Governor Ducey for providing five ventilators to the Community to utilize in Gila River Health Care’s ICU for COVID-19-related patients.

In addition, the President highlighted an Administration announcement that Tribal Nations would be receiving funds from the Tribal Relief Fund that was included in the CARES Act. The Tribal Relief Fund was included in the Act to help tribes offset COVID-19-related expenses caused by the pandemic. The funding has been delayed but today the Departments of Treasury and Interior announced the disbursement of 60% to the Tribes which will be released today, with the remaining 40% withheld pending additional economic analysis. In his statement at the Roundtable, Governor Lewis made five points:

- One, he thanked the President and his Chief of Staff for their direct assistance in getting a portion of this money out today, and for their assistance in making the allocation formula better than it had been by including economic factors in the distribution allocation formula.
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- Two, he emphasized that tribes need help now and cannot wait for the litigation to end before additional payments are made to tribes from the Tribal Relief Fund. He asked that President Trump please direct the Treasury Department to make these payments sooner.
- Three, he indicated that the Administration needs to spread the limited resources currently available from the Tribal Relief Fund as far as it can and avoid over-allocating to a very few tribes and under allocating to most others as they distribute the second tranche of payments. This means that the Administration should include a limit, or cap, on the total funding any one tribe receives to ensure equity throughout Indian Country.
- Four, he asked the President to have the Administration provide flexible guidance to allow tribes to use the funds they do receive to keep tribal governments running.
- Five, he emphasized that the distributions made today make clear that the current fund of \$8 billion is going to be woefully inadequate to meet tribes' overall needs and tribes will need to work with the Administration, Senator McSally and other congressional champions to take this to the next level and get more money for tribes.

Governor Lewis stated "I hope my comments today are helpful for not only our Community but for all of Indian Country, and I look forward to working with Senator McSally, Chief of Staff Meadows, the Administration and Congress on the next relief bill to get more funding and to make sure these funds are going where they are most needed and in a way that shows that our governments and our economic entities can be part of the recovery that will be so critical as we come out of this crisis and rebuild our tribal, state and national economy."

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Gila River Indian Community located on 372,000 acres in south-central Arizona and home to the indigenous O'odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) people. The Tribe is comprised of seven districts, the administrative offices and departments are located in Sacaton, and serve the people throughout these seven community districts. 100% of its profits from gaming and 17 other Enterprises are utilized by the community providing services and opportunities to achieve the highest quality of life.
