



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly, TCDC welcome N.M. Transportation Secretary Faught to Window Rock

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly welcomed New Mexico State Transportation Secretary Rhonda G. Faught to the Navajo Nation when she visited to update the Navajo Nation Council Transportation and Community Development Committee about U.S. Highway 491 expansion.

“I am glad the Highway 491 project is moving forward,” the Vice President said. “Negotiations between the Navajo Nation and State of New Mexico can be considered a pioneer effort.”

Vice President Shelly thanked TCDC Committee Chairman Sampson Begay, Vice Chairman Johnny Naize, and committee members Lorenzo Bedonie, David Rico, Omer Begay, Jerry Bodie, Leslie Dele, and Willie Begay for their work and continued support of the project.

“In the past, Highway 491 negotiations were mired in difficult problems,” he said. “I’m glad we were able to come together, work together, and get this project moving forward.”

Secretary Faught told the committee that the design and construction of the U.S. Highway 491 project is moving forward. The first phase is slated to begin in May, which consists of pavement rehabilitation.

The Secretary stressed the importance of completing the construction a four-lane highway to address the unsafe conditions of today’s Highway 491.

“Transportation is a health issue,” she said. “When people are maimed, it is a health issue as well as a community development issue.”

According to New Mexico DOT, maintaining a comprehensive construction schedule for U.S. Highway 491 is dependent upon the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ approval of the terms and conditions to the easement for U.S. Highway 491, as well as the execution of the document by the Navajo Nation and the New Mexico Department of Transportation.

Until additional funds become available, she said, the remainder of improvements to the northern corridor will consist of pavement rehabilitation.



Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly accompanied New Mexico State Transportation Secretary Rhonda G. Faught to the Navajo Nation Council Transportation and Community Development Committee’s meeting this week. The Secretary updated the committee on the progress being made on the Highway 491 expansion. The Vice President and Secretary have been meeting since last year to eliminate legal issues that temporarily jeopardized the highway’s expansion. Pictured with the Secretary (center), the committee and Vice President (in bolo tie) is N.M. Sen. John Pinto, a longtime advocate of the 491 expansion.

During a luncheon for Secretary Faught, Vice President Shelly expressed appreciation to New Mexico Senator John Pinto for his work in the New Mexico Legislature for the highway.

“Every morning, my wife and I pray,” Senator Pinto said. “We pray for everybody and we always pray for 491.”

The Vice President thanked New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie, Navajo Nation Department of Transportation Manager Tom Platero and the Navajo Nation’s Department of Transportation team, as well as Navajo Nation Division of Community Development Executive Director Arbin Mitchell and his employees for their commitment to the U.S. Highway 491 construction project.

“New Mexico DOT is always willing to work with the Navajo DOT and it takes a lot of people to get a project moving,” Navajo Nation DOT Manager Tom Platero said.