



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 20, 2009

CONTACT:

Sherrick S. Roanhorse

Executive Staff Assistant

Office of Vice President Ben Shelly

928.871.7001 Office

928.255.2132 Mobile

Navajo Vice President Ben Shelly joins Gov. Bill Richardson to sign State-Tribal Collaboration Act to ensure cooperation

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly joined New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson and Senator John Pinto for the signing of the New Mexico State Tribal Collaboration Act on Thursday.

“SB 196 will result in better coordination of resources to address shared priorities as well as higher quality services to our more than 200,000 Native American citizens in New Mexico.”

“The concept of this new law sets precedence for other states to follow,” Vice President Shelly said. “The State Tribal Collaboration Act will enable New Mexico’s 22 tribes and the State of New Mexico to work more effectively on a government-to-government basis by requiring all state agencies to implement stronger collaboration and communication policies with tribes.”

SB 196, the State Tribal Collaboration Act, sponsored by Sen. Pinto, passed its last legislative hurdle in the New Mexico House of Representatives by a vote of 62-0 on March 15.

“The State of New Mexico recognizes all tribes as an equal,” Governor Richardson said. “Now we are making it official with a law passed by the New Mexico Legislature.”

Among its important provisions, the new law requires the governor to hold an annual summit with tribal leaders and each state agency designate a tribal liaison to work directly with tribes.

“I am truly moved by the passage of this bill which is a culmination of work that has been done by many people over many years,” Sen. John Pinto said.



*Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly joined New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson and Senator John Pinto Thursday for the signing of the New Mexico State Tribal Collaboration Act.
Sherrick Roanhorse Photo*

Since taking office, Governor Richardson elevated the Office of Indian Affairs to a New Mexico Department of Indian Affairs, as well as signing executive orders to strengthen government-to-government relationships by promoting collaboration and communication policies with tribes.

In her floor remarks on March 15, Representative Sandra D. Jeff told members of the House of Representatives, "The State Tribal Collaboration Act will institutionalize a process that this body has long supported. Governor Richardson's consultation policies with tribes have resulted in many successes on education, water, health, and law enforcement issues and this act will ensure that the spirit of this partnership continues in future administrations."

During the legislative process, Vice President Shelly provided testimony to several legislative committees to support the bill.

"In the past, many New Mexico state agencies, such as the Department of Transportation, Human Services Department, and State Engineer's Office, have acted and made notable efforts to better coordinate and collaborate with the Navajo Nation and other tribes," Vice President Shelly told the Senate Indian and Cultural Affairs Committee on February 3. "With this act, the relationship between the State of New Mexico and tribes will grow and continue in future administrations, as well as provide greater consistency among state agencies."

Several legislators worked with Sen. Pinto to push the bill through the legislature, including Senators Lynda Lovejoy, George Munoz, Mary Jane Garcia, and Eric Griego, and Representatives Ray Begaye, Patricia Lundstrom, Sandra D. Jeff, James Madalena, and Elisio Lee Alcon.

"Many of our hard working senators and representatives, especially those who represent Navajo constituents, worked with Senator Pinto and Indian Affairs Secretary Warren to move this bill forward and I commend all of them for their efforts," the Vice President said. "From the Navajo Nation, Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan, Navajo Nation Council Delegates, and several division heads provided the support needed to move this significant legislation forward and their efforts help set precedence for state and tribal relationships."

###