



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., calls passage of HR 146 historic day for Navajo Nation water rights, growth, development

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., called today's passage of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 an historic day for Navajo Nation water rights that brings the possibility of drinking water for 80,000 Navajos ever closer to reality.

"This is a great day, a historic day for the Navajo Nation as it pursues its water rights," President Shirley said while traveling to Washington, D.C. on Wednesday. "This is what we need to ensure a share of water for growth and development."

The bill – HR 146 – passed the House today with a vote of 285-140 and combines more than 160 measures to create more than two million acres of new wilderness areas, along with wild and scenic rivers, historic sites, scenic trails, other protected lands and guarantees the Navajo Nation's water rights. The Senate voted to pass the bill 77-20 last Thursday.

Thirty-eight Republicans joined 247 Democrats in voting for the bill. The measure now heads to President Obama's desk for signature, which is hoped for sometime next week.

The legislation contains the authorization for the construction of the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project, an \$870 million water delivery system for Navajo communities from Shiprock to Gallup. The project would provide water to Gallup, N.M., the Jicarilla Apache Nation and eastern Arizona, including Window Rock. Some 37,764 water acre-feet would be used for the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project.

This legislation also settles certain water rights between the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico and clarifies the administration of Navajo Lake reservoir releases by affirming water quantities and distribution for projects such as the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project

President Shirley said he will offer his sincere thanks to New Mexico U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall for their leadership and perseverance, as well as to Congressmen Ben Ray Lujan, Harry Teague and Martin Heinrich.

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– Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr.

The President said he also wants to send a special thank you to House Subcommittee on Water and Power Chairwoman Grace Napolitano and retired U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, both whom championed the settlement.

The President had praise for the Navajo Nation Council which he said had the courage to approve the settlement agreement in December 2004 and the patience to wait for Congress to act.

He also thanked the Navajo Nation Water Rights Commission, the staff of the Navajo Nation Department of Justice and the Navajo Water Resources Department for their diligent work.

"Nothing is ever accomplished without working together, and this step forward demonstrates that clearly," he said.

Navajo Nation water rights attorney Stanley Pollack, who

has worked on Navajo water rights issues for 23 years, said the Nation has waited for this since April 19, 2005, when the State of New Mexico signed the San Juan River Settlement Agreement.

The next step is to have Congress appropriate funding to construct the Navajo-Gallup water pipeline which will allow for the development of a rural water supply system to serve Navajo and non-Navajo residents in northwest New Mexico and the Navajo Nation in far western Arizona, he said.

"This is the biggest accomplishment in my professional career," Mr. Pollack said. "But it's just another step in the long road we have to go to get Navajos drinking water."

Although the Navajo government has sought drinking water for its people for decades, Mr. Pollack said, many of the communities in the region do not have access to a renewable and sustainable water supply.

The Navajo-San Juan River Water Rights Settlement resolved a water dispute that began in 1975 between the state of New Mexico and the Navajo Nation over the water supply of the San Juan River, he said. The solution to that, he said, is the Navajo-Gallup Pipeline.

"It's been a long drawn out battle pertaining to regulations, policies, and legislation," said Gil Arviso, vice

chairman of the Navajo Nation Water Rights Commission. "The Navajo Nation Water Rights Commission and the Navajo Department of Justice were able to create the opportunities that are contained with the development and realization of the water settlement that has passed."

"The key is that it's going to open up water that will be the catalyst to development," Mr. Arviso told the Associated Press on Wednesday. "The Commission is very, very excited that it's going to the President's desk next week."

"This historic signing by the President, when it happens, will allow 80,000 Navajos to get water," he said. "It will be a catalyst, a major catalyst, for development of all types that will improve and increase the quality of life for these Navajo people."

He said the Water Rights Commission will continue to seek appropriations for the pipeline project.

"The main thing is this legislation is now a reality," he said. "The responsibility is to assure that there is clean water available to us which will ensure better health for our people, and create the mechanism support the economic development that will happen."

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