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USDA Secretary Vilsack Hosts Tribal Leaders

Vice President Shelly urges more funds for telecommunications infrastructure

WASHINGTON, D.C. (November 4) – Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly emphasized the need to extend broadband infrastructure to rural tribal communities during a meeting today with the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack.

“Building out broadband infrastructure is the best opportunity to make our children and our educational systems competitive in the 21st century,” said Vice President Shelly. “Technology infrastructure will also provide for greater delivery of health care services to remote areas. Telecommunications infrastructure is the surest way to kick start the economic engine on tribal lands.”

Vice President Shelly requested the USDA’s Rural Utility Service (RUS), a program which funds rural broadband projects, focus more American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds on the development of telecommunications infrastructure on tribal lands.

“As we try to move this country into a 21st century economy,” the USDA will ensure it maintains an “aggressive RUS program,” said Secretary Vilsack. “We must also expand opportunities in broadband so that rural communities can link into the World Wide Web.”

Besides the RUS, USDA houses several programs, such as, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the U.S. Forest Service.

“The Navajo Nation has a strong working relationship with the USDA and it is important to that we partner to create economic opportunity for the Navajo people,” said Vice President Shelly. “We also want to ensure that the good work between the Navajo Nation and USDA on issues such as animal identification and disease prevention remains a priority with the Obama administration.”

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Navajo Nation Council Delegates Jerry Freddie and Evelyn Acothley also joined Vice President Shelly at the USDA meeting.

“The USDA has many programs we can take advantage of for economic and infrastructure development,” said Council Delegate Acothley. “USDA also holds a close relationship with the Navajo Nation and I know that through partnerships, we can move projects forward to benefit our communities.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture meeting with tribal leaders was among the roundtables held before Thursday’s President Barack Obama’s White House Tribal Nations Conference with leaders of 564 federally recognized tribes.

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