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## **President Shelly Start Water Settlement Forums Before Standing Room Only**

**TUBA CITY, Ariz.** –Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly assured a capacity chapter house crowd that the he hasn't formed a position on the Little Colorado River Water Settlement Act.

“I am still learning just like you are,” he told the nearly 230 people in a standing room only chapter house Tuesday evening.

President Shelly and the meeting attendees were part of the first of seven water forums that are planned to take place through the southern part of the Navajo reservation. Vice President Rex Lee Jim and Council Delegates Jonathan Nez, Leonard Tsosie, Duane Tsinigine, Joshua Butler, and Navajo Nation Water Rights Commissioners also attended the meeting.

The Office of the President and Vice President in coordination with the Navajo Nation Water Rights Commission organized the water forums to educate concerned citizens about the Little Colorado River Water Rights Settlement Act, introduced into the U.S. Senate in February.



President Ben Shelly took time after the six hour meeting to listen to concern citizens who expressed their opinions about the Little Colorado Water Settlement.

The forum started with a more than 40 slide power point presentation that relayed information from basic definitions of water rights, maps of the affected settlement areas,

and the breakdown of how proposed money would be spent to develop water infrastructure if the settlement was approved.

The power point presentation lasted more than an hour and while the chapter house was filled with people, about 60 people, some of whom held signs in protest of the settlement waited outside.



After the presentation, the floor was opened up for questions from the attendees and more than 20 people had five minutes to pose their questions and or make statements to the leaders present.

Most of the statements were against the settlement, some cited Navajo cultural teachings that the water was too sacred to give up water rights, while others said Senators John McCain and Kyl weren't to be trusted.

consider giving up, others stated they didn't want to give up water rights,

Nearly 230 people packed the Tuba City Chapter House and listened to speakers and presenters about the Little Colorado River Water Rights Settlement.

Leaders responded to questions

and statements throughout the night.

“Do you guys have a safety net,” one woman asked leaders after the meeting, reiterating a common sentiment by some concerned citizens.

The Little Colorado Water Settlement Act proposes about \$358 million would go to the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe for water infrastructure projects, which two thirds of that money going to Navajo.

People wanted to know if the Navajo Nation approved the settlement, would Congress get the money to the tribes.



Water Commissioner Ray Gilmore said the Congress has to allocate money to the projects otherwise the Navajo Nation gives no waivers.

According to documents, the settlement has to be funded by 2022.

About 60 people, some of whom protested the water settlement, stood outside and listened to presenters on a loud speaker system

Water Commissioner Gilmore also said that about 220,00 acre feet flows through the Little Colorado per year, and the Navajo Nation would gain access to 160,000 acre feet per year with the settlement.

That amount would be in addition to the unlimited access to the ground water.

In a meeting last month, Sen. Kyl told Navajo leaders that he would only push the bill through Congress if the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe approved of the measure.

The following is a schedule of remaining water settlement forums:

- **April 18, 2012** Pinon Chapter House, Pinon, Ariz.
- **April 19, 2012** Ganado Chapter House, Ganado, Ariz.
- **April 20, 2012** Oak Springs Chapter House, Oak Springs, Ariz.
- **April 24, 2012** Leupp Chapter House, Leupp, Ariz.
- **April 25, 2012** Teesto Chapter House, Teesto, Ariz.
- **April 26, 2012** Fort Defiance Chapter House, Fort Defiance, Ariz.

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