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For Immediate Release
April 5, 2012

President Shelly Tells Arizona Senators The People Have the Final Say in Water Rights



(Left to Right) Navajo Nation Speaker Johnny Naize, Sen. John McCain, Sen. Jon Kyl, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and Vice President Rex Lee Jim met for an hour in Tuba City to discuss Kyl's proposed Little Colorado River water settlement.

TUBA CITY, Ariz.- Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said he wanted to hear from the people before forming a concrete position about the "Navajo-Hopi Little Colorado River Water Rights Settlement Act of 2012."

"I want to hear from the people first," President Shelly said during an hour-long meeting with Senators Jon Kyl and John McCain today with Vice President Rex Lee Jim and 13 Council Delegates including Speaker Johnny Naize.

Sen. Kyl asked for the meeting with the Navajo Nation leaders. The Senators also met with Hopi tribal leaders in a separate meeting.

Sen. Kyl introduced the "Navajo-Hopi Little Colorado River Water Rights Settlement Act of 2012" in the U.S. Senate in February this year. The bill, S. 2109, proposes to settle water claims regarding the Little Colorado River.

The Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe settle their claims to the Little Colorado River watershed in exchange for water infrastructure, which would include Leupp-Dilkon Groundwater Project and the Ganado Groundwater Project.

The cost of the infrastructure, including a Hopi groundwater project, is estimated to be about \$300 million.

During the meeting both Senators made clear the bill, sponsored by Sen. Kyl, wouldn't move forward in Congress without support of the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe.

"If the Navajo people don't want the settlement, that's fine with us," Sen. McCain said during the opening statements of the meeting.

In conjunction with the Navajo Nation Water Rights Commission, the Office of the Navajo Nation President and Vice President plans to hold seven scheduled public forums to inform the Navajo people about the water settlement later this month.

"As a leader I represent the people. This water settlement is not an easy issue to address as it deals with water and water is sacred. It gives life and sustains life not only for the Navajo people but for humanity," President Shelly said.

However, Sen. Kyl, who is retiring from the U.S. Senate this year, said time is limited and that he needed the tribes to make up their minds soon.

"These settlements usually take a few years to do. We have a few months," Sen. Kyl said.

President Shelly said he understands the Navajo Nation has one of the keys for the bill to be pushed through Congress, but he wants to hear from the Navajo people about the issue first.

"It has to go to the people in order for it to be final. That is why we are having town hall meetings- to hear the people," President Shelly said.

Council Delegates in attendance asked questions about the security of the money for the water infrastructure and also addressed some issues about the Bennett Freeze area.

"We expect the money to be there. There has to be an even trade. That is an absolute," Sen. Kyl said about the water settlement money.

Sen. McCain also said money had been appropriated for the Bennett Freeze area.

But most of the discussions centered around Sen. Kyl's bill and the Senator emphasized the importance of trying to push the bill Congress.

"Right now there is a mood in Congress about spending money," Sen. Kyl said. "If this settlement does not get done this year, then it is unlikely to get done."

Water settlement forums held by the Navajo Nation Water Commission and the Office of the President and Vice President are scheduled to start later this month. The following is a schedule of water settlement forums.

- **April 17, 2012** Greyhills High School Auditorium, Tuba City, Ariz.
- **April 18, 2012** Pinon High School Auditorium, 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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