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Navajo President Shelly Meets with Utah Governor About the Utah Navajo Trust Fund

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly discussed the future of the more than \$40 million Utah Navajo Trust Fund with Utah Gov. Gary Herbert during a Friday meeting on June 29.

“We want the money to go to Utah Navajos,” President Shelly said during the meeting.

The meeting between President Shelly and Gov. Herbert was the first one since the Office of the President and Vice President conducted a series town hall meetings in February.

Since 2008, the Utah Navajo Trust Fund has been without a trustee when the Utah Legislature voted to forgo trustee status of the fund. The Navajo Nation has advocated to become the trustee of the fund and has been doing so since a 2001 Intergovernmental Relations Committee resolution was passed.

Since 2008, the fund has grown to more than \$40 million and remains frozen because it does not have a trustee.

Navajo Nation Chief of Staff Sherrick Roanhorse led a power point presentation that detailed the history of the trust fund, and thoughts from Utah Navajos about how the fund should be used. The discussion also included who should become trustee of the fund.

“The state of Utah absolutely wants out,” Gov. Herbert said about being a trustee of the fund. “We don’t want to be trustee. We want to push something through Congress to get us out,” Gov. Herbert added.

The Navajo Utah Trust Fund was created in 1933 when the Aneth Extension area was added to the Navajo Nation. The fund is based on royalties from oil and gas revenues generated from well in the Aneth Extension area.

Gov. Herbert said would help in areas he could in coming to a common solution to find a new trustee for the fund.

According to an OPVP report about the town hall meetings, the seven chapters that were visited didn't have one common solution about a trustee. Some asked for Utah to remain as trustee, while other didn't trust Utah, the Navajo Nation or other organizations vying for trustee status.

President Shelly said maybe payments directly to the chapters would be one idea, but the chapters would have to become certified under the Local Governance Act.

"I think its time for them to do something on their own," President Shelly said.

President Shelly said he would continue to work with Utah Navajos, the Council and other leaders to work to find a resolution for the UNTF.

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