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Navajo President Delivers the State of the Nation Address

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly outlined recent accomplishments from the Shelly/Jim administration during his quarterly State of the Nation address Monday at the opening day of the Navajo Nation Council’s fall session.

President Shelly started his 17 minute speech by stating a recent \$43 million agreement between the Navajo Nation and Department of Interior to give financial assistance to the Navajo Nation to build portions of the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project waterline.

The money plans to be spent to build portions of the lower access of the Cutter Lateral. The funding plans to help design and construction of 43 miles of water pipeline, a pumping station and four water storage tanks.

The overall NGWS project is expected to cost \$1 billion, build 280 miles of waterline to 43 chapters and create more than 600 jobs during construction.

“This project is a result of the Navajo Nation Water Rights Settlement in the San Juan River Basin in New Mexico,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly also spoke about an agreement that strengthens Navajo sovereignty.

The Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency will oversee the clean up of a mine in District 17 in New Mexico, according to a “Temporary Access Agreement” with Hydro Resources Inc.

The agreement calls for the mine in District 17 to follow Navajo Nation standards.

For the first time, the NNEPA will ensure clean up follows the standards in the Navajo Nation Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act of 2008.

President also relayed information regarding uranium mine cleanup in Cove, Ariz., Casamero Lake, New Mex., and Church Rock, New Mex.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced that \$7.5 million would be spent to cleanup mines in those communities.

To help with the cleanup, President Shelly said job training would be available through the Navajo Nation Superfund Job Training Initiative.

“As we look ahead, the U.S. EPA is predicting that another \$44 million could be put toward cleaning the Northeast Church Rock Mine. With training available now, future mine clean ups could employ hundreds of Navajos in the future,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly also said he is confident that Navajo Head Start, which has had non-compliance issues for several years, is headed in a good direction.

“In August, we brought on Sharon Singer, who became the first licensed superintendent to lead Navajo Head Start. She brings years of teaching and administrative experience. With Ms. Singer’s proven leadership we are committed to bringing the program fully into compliance with more than 2,800 federal standards,” President Shelly said,=.

President Shelly stated that he intends to create a task force to find solutions to issues Navajo residents who live on Hopi Partitioned lands including building some homes for relocated Navajo families on Turquoise Ranch near Winslow, Ariz., which was recently established into trust status.

“These issues are complicated and I’m going to look towards creating a taskforce to look at what the executive branch and other stakeholders can do for planning and developing the Navajo-Hopi Partitions Lands,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly visited nearly eight homes in the past few weeks that were on Hopi Partitioned Lands.

President Shelly also updated the Council about recent progress in the Red Dog Gravel project. The project involves partnerships between the Navajo Nation, Navajo County, chapters, Peabody Western Coal Company, and others.

Red dog gravel is being delivered to 10 chapters in the Black Mesa area, where the gravel is found.

“We are in the process of graveling roads in these areas and have delivered more than 40,000 tons of red-dog gravel. We have plans to continue graveling roads for these areas. This project is working because we all have worked together,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly also announced the implementation of a new project to revamp the hiring process within the Navajo Nation government.

The pilot project gives more authority to divisions and programs to have input on hiring for new employees, so they may find candidates that are best suited for their programs.

“Our goal is to bring the most qualified people to our workforce, including our valuable children. We need to have jobs for them when they want to come home,” President Shelly said.

The State of the Nation address also covered topics such as the budget and coal revenues.

For President’s speech in its entirety please visit <http://www.president.navajo-nsn.gov> and look for “State of the Nation” under the “Constituent Services” tab.

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