



Contact: Erny Zah
Director of Communications

Cell: (928) 380-0771

navajonationpress@navajo-nsn.gov

For Immediate Release
October 3, 2012

Navajo President Calls for NGWS Jobs to Consist of 98 Percent Navajo Workforce

TSE BONITO, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly stated he wants to have the workforce that's building the Navajo Gallup Water Supply to consist of 98 percent Navajo employees.

President Shelly stated that in his opening statement during a meeting with Department of Interior Sec. Ken Salazar and Navajo leaders last Friday morning, Sept 28, at the Navajo Division of Transportation Complex. More than 80 people attended the meeting.



Navajo President Ben Shelly (left) talks with Department of Interior Sec. Ken Salazar before a formal meeting on Sept. 28.

“I want to see 98 percent of the workers be Navajo,” President Shelly stated during the more than hour meeting.

The Department of Interior recently announced that \$43 million would be allocated to help build the Navajo Gallup Water Supply Project. The entire project is expected to cost upwards of \$900 million, create more than 600 jobs during construction and bring safe clean drinking water to thousands of Navajo people.

The meeting, Sec. Salazar said, was for him to listen to Navajo leaders and their issues.

The President said Department of the Interior needs to work the Navajo Nation for natural resource management and development, better utilize trust and assets to grow Navajo wealth, and better communication within federal agencies to Native American tribes.

In addition, President Shelly added that issues about the Navajo Hopi land dispute are though mostly resolved, need attention to ensure that issues are addressed to completion.

President Shelly submitted a written statement to Sec. Salazar outlining the need for more funding for the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation and more help for Navajos living in the former Bennett Freeze area.

“At the current rate of funding, we anticipate that it may be another 20 years for ONHIR completes its work. That means a family which relocated 10 years ago, it will have waited 30 years to receive promised benefits,” President Shelly wrote.

Navajo Nation Council Speaker Johnny Naize reiterated the need for help for the ONHIR and for people living in the former Bennett Freeze area.

“Our people in the affected area have had to work twice, or even four times, as hard to travel on unmaintained roads to haul water for basic consumption,” Speaker Naize said.

Navajo Supreme Court Justice Eleanor Shirley represented the third branch of the Navajo government and asked Salazar for funding support for a new Supreme Court Judicial Complex.

Attending Council Delegates, about a dozen, also expressed the need for help for Navajo people affected by the Navajo Hopi Land dispute.

“There is hope that we can do some great things on the issues which you have raised today,” Sec. Salazar said after listening to the Navajo leaders.

“You have our commitment and you have seen us walk the talk over the last several years,” Sec. Salazar added.

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