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## Navajo President Shelly Signs Letter to Obama Asking for Disaster Declaration



President Ben Shelly (center) signs the letter directed to Obama. Standing in support (left to right) Navajo Emergency Management Director Rose Whitehair, Council Delegate Jonathan Nez, Council Delegate Elmer Begay, and Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon.

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** - Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly signed a letter Tuesday afternoon asking U.S. President Barack Obama to declare a disaster pertaining to the emergency declaration President Shelly signed last month.

“We are exercising our sovereign authority provided by the Stafford Act and we are taking our concerns directly to President Obama. As a sovereign nation, we need President Obama to recognize our emergency and declare it a federal disaster. We

had thousands of Navajo residents without water for several weeks because of frozen water lines,” President Shelly said.



A Phoenix based crew from Salt River Project work to restore water to a home near Navajo, New Mex.

The 23 page document lists costs the Navajo Nation expended during Operation Winter Freeze estimated at \$5.2 million.

The letter states the Navajo Nation’s water infrastructure was damaged beyond the tribe’s ability to fix or repair in a timely manner that would keep the health of people from being negatively impacted.

Authority, and two from Salt River Project helped restore water to homes that were affected by the freeze.

Twenty-six crews, 15 from NTUA, nine from Navajo Engineering Construction

In January, President Obama signed legislation amending the Stafford Act allowing federally recognized American Indian Tribes to appeal directly to the President of the United States for disaster declarations. The Navajo Nation is the second tribe, but the Navajo Nation has the largest reservation that spans through three states and is the size of West Virginia.



A three-inch water pipe had frozen water. The pipe was replaced.

On January 25, President Shelly signed an emergency declaration for the Navajo Nation where majority of Navajo residents were without running water because of abnormally below freezing temperatures. For nearly a month, temperatures for parts of the Navajo Nation dipped to 25 below zero at night, while daytime temperatures climbed to the teens.

The long lasting cold spell caused waterlines as large as 14 inches to freeze. Emergency officials estimate that more than 18,000 people were affected by the water outages. Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, which is the sole water utility, stated that at least 3,500 water outages were reported.

“We are taking our sovereignty to a new level. We are moving forward and strengthening our sovereignty by sending this letter. We will do all we can to help our Navajo people,” President Shelly said.

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