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## **President Shelly Seeks for \$2.8 Million to Fund Operation Winter Freeze**

**TSE BONITO, N.M.** – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly is beginning efforts to seek funding for Operation Winter Freeze, which is estimated to cost \$2.8 million.

Operation Winter Freeze began after President Shelly signed an emergency declaration nearly two weeks ago because waterlines throughout the Navajo Nation froze and broke, leaving as many as 10,000 people without running water for as long as two months. The money would pay for an additional 15 crews for three weeks, and operational costs of the Emergency Operations Center.

“We need to continue funding the Operation Winter Freeze. People with health risks don’t have running water, some communities have low water pressure that are putting health centers and hospitals at risk of closure. We are facing an emergency that is putting lives at risk,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly outlined a plan that involves sending a letter seeking assistance from Department of Interior, working with the state of New Mexico’s Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, and asking for volunteers to help with the emergency.

Arizona Department of Emergency Management has been at the Emergency Operations Center since last week.

“This is an emergency and we need every agency to help us,” President Shelly said.

For weeks, crews from Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, Navajo Engineering and Construction Authority and Salt River Project have been repairing waterline breaks. Some of the water pipes were built in the 1950s.

In January, the Navajo Nation experienced three weeks of temperatures that dipped as much as 25 degrees below zero, while days only warmed to temperatures in the teens.

The extreme cold temperatures caused waterlines to freeze in multiple areas, so when one line was repaired, the water pressure would cause a breakage elsewhere down the line. Many of the water outages are attributed to these conditions.

NTUA estimates that about 730 reported water outages have yet to be inspected and throughout the last few weeks, crews have responded to more than 940 reports throughout the Navajo Nation. Crownpoint and Shiprock districts have the most reports that have yet to be evaluated.

“I know our crews are working hard and we need to help them. We are looking for volunteers to help feed our crews working long hours to fix our water,” President Shelly said.

Communities are still being asked to conserve water as the emergency nears the end of its second week. Water pressure is still a concern for communities with hospitals because if water pressure drops to low, then hospitals will be forced to close.

“Fort Defiance and Chinle were two communities where water pressure was an issue. We continue to monitor these two communities, but we are also observant of other communities with hospitals,” said Rose Whitehair, Navajo Nation Emergency Management director.

She added that volunteers are needed for the emergency command center.

“We have 10,000 people without water and we need all the help we can get right now,” she added.

Also, representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency Region 9 will be on the Navajo Nation beginning on Wednesday.

They will help the Navajo Nation present their emergency to FEMA and President Barrack Obama. Last week, the U.S. Senate passed amendments to the Stafford Act, which President Obama is expected to sign, allowing federally recognized tribal nations to appeal to directly ask the federal government for emergency and disaster declarations.

The Navajo Nation is taking steps to get reimbursed from FEMA should this be recognized by FEMA.

“We are doing all we can to make sure our people are getting help. We will resolve this issue and get people water. We are a strong people and we will persevere,” President Shelly said.

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