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President Shelly Outlines Measures Taken to Help with Operation Winter Freeze

TSE BONITO, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly outlined the steps he has taken to ask for help with Operation Winter Freeze during a meeting at the Navajo Division of Transportation Complex Thursday afternoon.

President Shelly said he has sent a letter to New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez and to the Bureau of Indian Affairs asking for assistance with resources for Operation Winter Freeze which is expected to cost \$2.8 million to help thousands of Navajo people restore their water services.

Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer declared a state of emergency for parts of northern Arizona affected by the water shortage.

“We are working to make sure our people get water again. We have Navajo people who are suffering, and we need to get them water. Some of our people have been without water for months,” President Shelly said during a debriefing meeting Thursday afternoon.

“I also want to commend the chapters that are already taking the lead to help their communities. And I want to thank Gov. Brewer, Gov. Martinez and other state and local leaders for helping our people,” President Shelly added.

President Shelly called the meeting and called all Navajo Nation Executive Branch Divisions to the meeting so they could be updated and find ways to help the people without water.

“You work for the people. Our people are suffering right now. We can’t let that happen. We have to help our people,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly also welcome officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency who are here helping the Navajo Nation with technical assistance with asking

President Barack Obama to declare a federal emergency so the Navajo Nation could receive FEMA funding for Operation Winter Freeze.

President Obama recently signed the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act, which contained amendments to the Stafford Act that allows federally recognized Native American tribes to seek a federal emergency or disaster declaration from the President of the United States.

“Keep all your records in order - from time worked, to receipts. We are going to need all our financial records to be in order if we are going to get reimbursed,” President Shelly said.

Emergency management officials estimate that 10,000 people on the Navajo Nation are without water because of broken or leaking water lines. Water lines froze after nearly three weeks of temperatures that regularly dipped 20 degrees below zero at night.

Crews from NTUA, Navajo Engineering and Construction Authority and Salt River Project all have crews working throughout the Navajo Nation to fix water lines.

The money President Shelly is seeking would be enough to run the emergency operations center and to hire 15 additional crews to help with repairs.

“We are going to continue doing all we can to help our people,” President Shelly said.

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