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## Navajo veteran commanders provide updates, plan of action for Veterans Act



*Veteran commanders from the five agencies provide an update on the Navajo veterans housing initiative and their plans to implement the Navajo Nation Veterans Act. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.— The Office of the President and Vice President hosted a meeting for the five agency veteran commanders of the Navajo Nation today.

Chief of Staff Deswood Tome met with Edsel Pete, Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs manager, veteran service officers, and agency commanders from all five agencies. Division of Human Resources executive director Lorenzo Curley served an important role in the meeting, as he has worked with the veterans department for the last two weeks, providing direction.

The regular monthly meeting provided an opportunity for the Executive Branch to hear agency updates on the Navajo veterans housing project and discussions on formulating a plan of operation for implementation of

the Navajo Nation Veterans Act.

President Shelly was in Washington, D.C. meeting with federal officials, but took time out of his schedule to comment on Navajo veterans and said they must work together toward the common goal of implementing the Navajo Nation Veterans Act.

Before serving as president and vice president, President Shelly was a council delegate for 16 years and served as chairman of the Budget and Finance Committee. During his tenure, the Navajo Nation Veterans Trust Fund was established.

“I supported the Veterans Trust Fund and the set aside that was established to fund services,” President Shelly said. “We will continue working to implement the Veterans Act to provide services.

“Many of our kids are

returning home from combat in need of health care, counseling and employment. It’s our turn to protect them,” the president said.

President Shelly said the need for Navajo veterans from the five agencies not only include housing, health care, retirement and employment, but other areas such as communication and common courtesy.

“We will complete the plan of operation and other new developments, like the veterans apartment complex we want to construct in Window Rock,” he said.

On Jan. 27, 2014, President Shelly approved more than \$1.9 million to begin construction of 300 veterans homes in four years. The initiative was for construction of 15 homes per agency, which equals 75 homes annually.

For 2014, the agencies averaged 12-13 homes completed. Many agency commanders are anticipating completion of their initial 15 homes by the end of March. The agencies are preparing for construction of the next 15 homes in 2015.

There is a need for veterans in need of housing who qualify for the program at the agency level. As the agencies prepare to begin construction of the next 75 homes for 2015, Navajo veterans must step forward for assistance.

The two biggest challenges for many veterans to overcome in order to participate in the housing initiative are having a home site lease and supporting chapter resolution.