



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 23, 2015

President Shelly meets with Democratic House leader Nancy Pelosi



President Shelly shares a moment with Wisconsin Congresswoman Gwen Moore at the conclusion of the meeting between congressional members and tribal leaders last Friday. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

SANTA FE—The minority leader of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and other congressional members met with Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and other tribal leaders in a private meeting in Santa Fe last Friday.

President Shelly met with Congresswoman Pelosi on March 20 at Buffalo Thunder Casino and shared issues from the Navajo Nation. He focused on energy development and stimulating the tribal economy.

“Today, the Navajo Nation has more than its fair share of poverty,” President Shelly said.

He said the tribe has an unemployment rate bordering on 60 percent and the average Navajo earns only \$7,200 annually. Forty percent of Navajo families lack running water and electricity, basic infrastructure most Americans take for granted.

“Dollars earned by Navajos are immediately spent in the

border towns circling the Navajo Nation. We have to break this cycle,” President Shelly said. “This means developing industries on the Nation that will attract business development.

“Bureaucratic red tape, delays in approvals, lack of basic business competence and a paternalistic view have created federal imposed poverty on the Navajo people,” he said.

Sponsored by the Tribal Engagement and Active Members Program (TEAM), the private event brought together tribal leaders and congressional members.

Congressman Ben Ray Lujan (D-N.M.), chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, facilitated the meeting discussions.

Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick (D-Ariz.), Congressman Xavier Becerra (D-Calif.), Congressman Derek Kilmer (D-Wash.) and Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-Wis.) also attended the

meeting to iron out issues facing tribes across Indian Country.

President Shelly explained that tribes were mired in a complex regulatory framework for the U.S., and often bogged down by the trust responsibilities of the federal government.

Nearly all the approvals to start a project on tribal lands require the approval of the U.S. Secretary of Interior, he said, adding that the U.S. EPA is another roadblock preventing tribes from executing projects.

“The delays imposed by these approvals can last for years and cost millions of dollars,” President Shelly said.

The time required to obtain federal regulatory approval discourages investors from spending their money on the Navajo Nation to fund projects and employment opportunities.

“Why in a time of decreasing federal budgets would the federal government want to limit the Navajo Nation’s ability to support itself?” President Shelly questioned.

The Navajo Nation economy is built upon coal, oil and natural gas.

With renewable energy the new battle cry on Capitol Hill, the Navajo Nation is left in a lurch because the tribe’s fossil fuel dependent economy must now move in the opposite direction.

He said this comes after the government pushed the Navajo Nation into a fossil fuel dependent economy in the early twentieth century to secure ridiculously low royalty rates for outside energy companies.

“So where does this leave us? We are even more dependent

on the federal government than we were yesterday. That is unacceptable,” President Shelly said.

The answer is energy generation.

Implementing new alternatives such as clean coal technology: Coal-to-gas, coal-to-liquid and government incentives to promote carbon capture and sequestration.

President Shelly said the federal government must give tribes the authority to approve leases, agreements and right-of-ways for the purpose of developing mineral resources and refining energy resources.

The ability for tribes to have true self-determination over their economic future is well worth the investment, he encouraged.

“For every energy job created, there are five to seven secondary jobs created to support that position,” President Shelly said. “Think about how many Navajos we can put to work, how many lives we can change.

“That is the beginning of creating a sustainable economy,” he concluded.

-30-

