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President Ben Shelly Addresses the National Gaming Association as the Navajo Nation's New Voting Member

Phoenix, AZ— At the largest Indian gaming conference in the country, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly addressed the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) members as the newly designated voting member of the Navajo Nation.

In his first introductory speech as a NIGA member, President Shelly reported the Navajo Nation's progress and development of four casinos.

“As I speak, the concrete foundation for our third casino is being poured at the Northern Edge Navajo Casino, located in Upper Fruitland, New Mexico,” He stated. “I am pleased to announce that Northern Edge has employed 98% of Navajo construction workers to build our casino. There's not another Native American tribe in the country who can match those numbers today. We anticipate all four Navajo casinos to provide about 2,500 jobs to tribal members and local communities.”

The Shelly-Jim Administration and the Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise recently broke ground in early March on their fourth largest casino project, Twin Arrows Navajo Casino and Resort in Arizona. Two other casinos fully operating in New Mexico include Flowing Waters Navajo Casino and Fire Rock Navajo Casino.

According to NIGA, nationwide, 237 Indian tribes in 28 states use Indian gaming to create new jobs, fund essential government services and rebuild communities. Overall Indian gaming has created 628,000 jobs for American Indians and their surrounding counties and states.

President Shelly concluded with a challenge to NIGA members to offer lower licensing vendor fees for Navajo or Native American vendors doing business with Indian casinos.

“I believe NIGA should progressively work with tribal and state regulatory agencies to improve the ability of our native vendors to obtain work and contracts with our Indian casinos for the purpose of putting our native vendors to work,” said President Shelly. “Right now vendor licensing fees cost \$1,000 regardless the size of the business. It is also my vision for the new NIGA board coming in to consider reducing Arizona licensing vendor fees. I leave you with that challenge today.”



(L to R) NIGA Secretary Bernadine Bernette, President Ben Shelly, NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, First Lady Martha Shelly and Mrs. Cheryl Stevens celebrate Chairman Stevens' re-election victory.

In 1778, the first Indian Treaty recognized tribal rights of self-government and today, Indian Tribes exercise their sovereignty authority to conduct Indian gaming. Prior to Indian gaming, there was no economic development on tribal lands.

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