



Contact: Erny Zah
Public Information Officer
Office: (928) 871-7884
Cell: (928) 380-0771
navajonationpress@navajo-nsn.gov

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President Ben Shelly Testifies Before Senate Committee

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly applauded recent efforts to expand broadband across the Navajo Nation that could provide wireless service to as many as 30,000 Navajo Nation residents.

President Shelly made that statement during his testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Thursday afternoon in the Senate Dirksen Building before a standing room only crowd of more than 100 people.



Navajo President Ben Shelly testified for five minutes about the Navajo Nation's recent broadband initiatives and other issues on the Navajo Nation.

He was one of five tribal leaders that delivered testimony to the Senate committee about "Deficit Reduction and Job Creation: Regulatory Reform in Indian Country."

During his speech, President Shelly also criticized a recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed rule changes that could affect Navajo jobs.

He said the recent broadband and wireless expansion by Navajo Tribal Utility Authority is a success of the Navajo Nation and shows Navajo Nation's ability to manage large grants.

"NTUA's performance under the ARRA grant has demonstrated to various federal agencies, and Congress, that the Navajo Nation has the capacity to administer and manage a massive broadband project," Shelly said from a prepared statement.

The Navajo Nation, through NTUA, received about \$32 million through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, to build a wireless and broadband network. Once built, the network would provide broadband services to 15,120 square miles on the Navajo Nation .

President Shelly said NTUA has worked hard to get the necessary environmental assessments to gain right of way rights to make way for 550 miles of a fiber optic route, 32 new microwave towers, technical equipment housing, and a data center.

All of which means job creation, President Shelly said.

"Hundreds of jobs are being created in construction and maintenance of the network," he said to the committee.

In addition, he noted that broadband access will also enable new businesses creation, provide more educational opportunities and telemedicine will become more attainable.

He also announced a recent NTUA petition to the Federal Communications Commission to create a telecommunications carrier called NTUA Wireless.

He then turned the subject to a recent U.S. EPA proposed ruling that mandated San Juan Generating Station to install emission reducing technology that could cost the plant \$775 million to install. President Shelly said those costs could mean jobs at the power plant, neighboring businesses and mine that contract with the plant.

"(The) U.S. EPA again intends to impose harsh new cost prohibitive standards on both plants, which together, utilizing Navajo coal, provide most of the revenue of the Navajo Nation's general funds, and further jeopardizes economic development and sustainability on the Navajo Nation," President Shelly said.

He also reaffirmed the Navajo Nation's commitment to work with the Federal Aviation Administration and National Park Service to create an exemption that would allow the Navajo Nation to allow commercial air tours over the Grand Canyon.

"We have given you a picture of what is working and what is not working on the Navajo Nation," he said.

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