



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President
and Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Mar. 22, 2023

Donovan Quintero, OPVP: (928) 871-7000
Chris Burnside, OOS: (928) 871-7160

Navajo Nation pays tribute to the life and service of former Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly



PHOTO: Former Navajo Nation Council Delegate and Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren and Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley offer their condolences and prayers, on behalf of the Navajo Nation, to the family of Honorable Ben Shelly, former President and Council Delegate of the Navajo Nation, who passed away from a long term illness on Wednesday, at the age of 75.

[MORE]

President Shelly served as a member of the Navajo Nation Council from 1991 to 2007 representing the community of Thoreau, N.M., before being elected as Vice President of the Navajo Nation from 2007 to 2011, and eventually becoming the President from 2011 to 2015. He also served as County Commissioner for McKinley County for eight years.

Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren met with Shelly during a meeting with former Navajo leaders at Twin Arrows Casino in December. President Nygren said he met Shelly several times when he was a student at Arizona State University and remembered the former president as a bold leader.

“He was very straightforward. He was always courageous. I think with that type of fearless attitude; just being a heavy equipment operator, to ascend to be president of the Navajo Nation is something to be said for his type of leadership style,” said President Buu Nygren. “Jasmine and I want to extend our condolences to his family. I think the state of New Mexico on the Navajo side should be very proud of him.”

Shelly was Tó'aheedlínii and was born for Ts'ah Yisk'idnii. His maternal grandfather was Áshjǫ́hí, and his paternal grandfather was Táchii'nii. The former President was married for 57 years to Martha Shelly, originally of Coyote Canyon. Together, they have five adult children, 12 grandchildren, and 3 great grandchildren. The president remained active in Navajo leadership after stepping down from office. He and his family operated a transportation business for the last seven years.

“On behalf of the 25th Navajo Nation Council, I offer my thoughts and prayers for Martha and their entire family during this difficult time. President Shelly will always be remembered in our hearts and minds for his great sense of humor, devoted public service, and his love for his people and family. We mourn the loss of our leader, but we honor and give thanks for his life and the legacy that he leaves behind,” said Speaker Curley.

Council Delegate Steven Arviso, who currently represents the community of Thoreau as a member of the Navajo Nation Council, remembered the service and contributions of President Shelly over the years.

“He was a strong person who always demonstrated great commitment to his people and our communities. My prayers are with Mrs. Shelly, their children, and grandchildren as they grieve for our leader. We thank him and his family for their sacrifices and service for the Navajo people,” Delegate Arviso stated.

[M O R E]

Erny Zah, director of communications and media affairs at Navajo Transitional Energy Company (NTEC), who previously served as Shelly's press officer, recalled President Shelly's role in establishing NTEC with his signing of legislation on May 3, 2013. The enactment of the bill allowed NTEC to own and operate the mine.

The family will be holding a private service for the former president. The Office of the President and Vice President is also coordinating with the family to hold a public memorial in honor of President Shelly. The Office of the President and Vice President will issue a proclamation calling for all flags on the Navajo Nation to be flown at half-staff in honor of President Shelly.

###