



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., praises Arizona Republic for special report spotlighting Navajo water rights, needs

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Sunday and Monday, the Arizona Republic published a two-part, 4,500-word special report titled “Navajo Nation Crisis” about the Navajo Nation’s efforts to assert its water rights to bring drinking water to its people.

The paper reports that, if approved by Congress, Navajo settlements would result in the largest Indian water rights settlement in history.

Written by the Republic’s water and environment reporter, Shaun McKinnon, the stories begin with a description of an elderly Navajo grandmother who ran out of water and had to endure a weekend without any.

“Ethel Whitehair ran out of water again over the weekend, emptied every bucket and pot, drained the barrels lined up outside her front door,” Mr. McKinnon wrote. “The community well was closed until Monday.

“Water from a well at a nearby windmill could supply the sheep, but it was untreated and made Whitehair’s skin itch. At another windmill down the road, vandals had torn the cover off the storage tank. Deep inside, a car battery steeped in the soupy dregs, the surface stirred by the bloated bodies of three dead crows.

“So Whitehair waited, as she had so often during her 87 years on Arizona’s Navajo Reservation. She waited for her children to come and haul water from the good well. She waited for someone to end an unthinkable water crisis.”

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., said today that he appreciated the Arizona Republic telling the Navajo people’s story.

“Although we Navajos are the largest tribe in Arizona and



the United States, we know so much more about the dominant culture than people know about us,” he said. “We’ve been telling this story for many years but I am sure the Republic’s stories about our need for something as basic as water were a revelation for many people, and for that I’m grateful.”

The Republic reports that nearly 80,000 Navajos must haul water for drinking, bathing and for their livestock.

“They live far from a water pipeline, and their communities barely have enough water to sustain what

few lines exist," it said. "The Navajos' water crisis has persisted so long, it has wormed its way into the routines of life.... Easing the crisis will require decades of work, billions of dollars and the patience to cut through the politics of Western water."

Because Navajos must haul their water in barrels in the backs of their pickup trucks, the story cited a Bureau of Reclamation report that estimated the economic cost to haul water as \$113 per 1,000 gallons, or \$37,000 for an acre-foot. By comparison, a Phoenix homeowner pays about \$5 a month for as much as 7,480 gallons, it said.



*In the bathroom of the Whitehair home, Jonathan Greyhatt of Tonalea fills bucket after bucket with water used for daily use. Homes are built with modern conveniences in hopes that one day they will have running water.
Mark Henle of The Arizona Republic*

The Republic reported on the San Juan River Water Settlement the Navajo Nation has reached with the State of New Mexico that, if approved by Congress, would build a water pipeline from the San Juan River south to Window Rock and Gallup, N.M., to provide drinking water to communities along the route. Getting to that point, however, will be difficult, the paper reported.

"The task is still overwhelming, tangled in a morass of laws, compacts, political interests and a water supply already stretched too thin," Mr. McKinnon wrote. "But failure would thrust the issue into court and threaten water supplies for millions of people."

"If the settlement were to fail," the stories quotes President Shirley as saying, "and the Navajo Nation were forced to pursue the litigation of its claims, the United States would still be exposed to horrific liabilities even if the Navajo Nation were to obtain only modest water rights."

To view Sunday's story online, go to:

<http://www.azcentral.com/news/green/articles/0826water-navajo0826.html>

To view Monday's story online, go to:

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/news/articles/0827water-navajodeal0827.html>