



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., lobbies in Washington for San Juan River Settlement, health care funding, judicial complex

WASHINGTON, D.C., Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., met with congressmen and their staff last week to seek their support on the San Juan River Water Rights Settlement, continued funding for Navajo Nation health care facilities, and funding support for the proposed Navajo Nation Supreme Court building.

to settle the Navajo Nation's water rights claims in the San Juan River Basin which requires Congressional action. Representative Tom Udall introduced the measure in the House of Representatives.

"This is an excellent example of working together to resolve differences and provide what our people need," President Shirley said. "Our people in the eastern Navajo Nation have been waiting for water all these years. We have quantified our rights to the water, we have shown that the State and Navajo Nation can negotiate a settlement that is fair to everyone, and we avoided a long and bitter court battle that would have left everyone poorer and no one satisfied. I'm very hopeful Congress recognizes the work and cooperation that's gone into this and follows through in the same spirit."

President Shirley and New Mexico Bill Richardson signed the settlement agreement between the Nation and State in April 2005. The legislation sponsored by Sens. Domenici, Bingaman and Rep. Udall reflects that agreement and recognizes approximately 600,000 acre-feet per year of water to the Navajo Nation for agricultural, municipal, industrial,

domestic and stock watering purposes. It also authorizes federal funding for the Navajo-Gallup Pipeline project and various water conservation projects in the basin.

Sens. Domenici and Bingaman said they intend to hold hearings on this bill within the next few months. The House version was sent to the House Resources Committee.

Under Sen. Bingaman's proposal, the federal government would contribute funding over two decades to construct the pipeline and implement the agreement. The legislation includes language to guarantee that federal funding will be available.



Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., meets with Rep. Raúl Grijalva of Arizona to discuss the need to keep Indian Health Care Improvement act, H.R. 1328, intact as it is without amendments.

The President and Navajo Nation Washington Office legislative associates Randall Simmons, Javier Ramos, and Simon Boyce met with Congressmen Rick Renzi and Raúl Grijalva of Arizona, Patrick Kennedy of Rhode Island, and staff for Congressmen Don Young of Alaska and Nick Rahall II of West Virginia.

On April 19, U.S. Sens. Pete Domenici, chairman and ranking member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Jeff Bingaman introduced the Northwestern New Mexico Rural Water Projects Act, the bill

"This bill brings to conclusion many years of negotiations, and would ensure that the Navajo Nation, cities of Gallup and Farmington, and other water users in the basin have adequate and assured quantities of water supplies into



President Shirley and Navajo Nation Washington Office legislative associate Randall Simmons, left, meet with Rep. Patrick Kennedy to discuss issues.

the future," Sen. Bingaman said in a news release. "It will also protect the interests of those receiving water from the San Juan-Chama project. The broad support that exists in New Mexico for this settlement makes it critical to now secure congressional support to settle this claim."

"When the resolution of water rights is left up to the courts, someone loses," Sen. Domenici said in a news release. "This bill begins the process of resolving Navajo water claims in a way that brings certainty to water allocation in the Four Corners area. It is also the first step in realizing a long-standing dream of mine to help provide a reliable water supply to Gallup and the Navajo Nation in New Mexico."

Rep. Udall said the Navajo Nation, State of New Mexico and many other residents of northwestern New Mexico have put a tremendous effort into reaching this agreement to provide a more secure future for many vulnerable communities.

"I am proud to be able to contribute to their work by introducing this legislation in the House, and starting it down the path of Congressional approval," he said. "I will work with my colleagues to pass this legislation to move this important water project forward."

President Shirley asked the congressmen not to amend section 301 of the Indian Health Care Improvement act, H.R. 1328, which would take construction money from Navajo projects to redistribute it to tribes in the Northwest.

He said the current problem with the Health Facility Construction Priority was created by a lack of funding to tribes. At one time, federal appropriations were \$132 million annually but tribes have seen that reduced to \$18 million annually, he said.

He said Navajo Nation Indian Health Service hospitals see nearly 1.2 million patients annually, far more than any other region in an area where there is considerably less health care access available.

An amendment to the law would eliminate construction funds needed for the planned clinics at Bodaway-Gap, Winslow/Dilkon and Pueblo Pintado, as well as the Gallup Indian Medical Center.

Several congressmen agreed with the President, stating that they did not favor amending the law, and that they did not appreciate the process used to have the amendment introduced.

President Shirley also sought their support for federal funding of the proposed Navajo Nation Judicial Complex to house the Navajo Nation Supreme Court. Last year, Sen. Domenici sought \$41.5 million for the complex but was unsuccessful in seeing the funding appropriated. This year he said he will request \$11 million for the project.

To date, the Navajo Nation has approved \$1.5 million for the complex design and has set aside nearly six acres of land in Window Rock for the location.

Last month, President Shirley, Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan and Navajo Nation Chief Justice Herb Yazzie wrote to numerous congressmen to express their support of legislation to provide federal funding. The complex will house the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch's administrative offices, Peacemaking Program, Probations Services and provide hearing and meeting rooms.

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