

DR. JOE SHIRLEY, JR.
Navajo Nation President

MR. BEN SHELLY
Navajo Nation Vice President



SHARON CLAHCHISCHILLIAGE
Executive Director

NAVAJO NATION WASHINGTON OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT

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Deswood Tome
202-682-7390 or 202-607-5507 (wireless)

Vice President Ben Shelly Testifies Before House Judiciary Subcommittee on Native American Methamphetamine Enforcement and Treatment Act of 2007

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelley testified today before a U.S. House Judiciary subcommittee on proposed House bill 545. The Navajo American Methamphetamine Enforcement and Treatment Act of 2007, proposes to amend the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act that authorizes programs for tribes to receive program funding.

“A year ago, there was a meth-related, execution-style, triple homicide on the Navajo Nation,” testified Vice President Shelly. “Two months later, in March 2006, an 81 year old Navajo grandmother, her 63 year old daughter, and her 39 year old granddaughter were arrested and charged with criminal possession with intent to distribute meth.”

The Vice President also testified on 14 meth-related deaths in Tuba City. He stated that a study showed 12 percent of Tuba City teens used meth, and 17 percent of the town’s adults were also users.

The bill before the committee is a technical amendment bill that corrects last year’s passage of the Combat Methamphetamine Act as part of the reauthorization of the USA PATRIOT Act. If passed by Congress, the bill will give tribes opportunity to receive federal funding for COPS Meth Hot Spots program, and the Drug-Endangered Children program. The bill also clarifies the intent of the Pregnant and Parenting Women Offenders program, strengthening tribal participation in this federal program.

All three programs fall under the direction of the U.S. Department of Justice. The Hot Spots program gives funding to assist local law enforcement agencies in their fight against methamphetamine activities. The other federal program, Drug Endangered Children Grant, provides comprehensive services to assist children who live in a home where meth has been used, manufactured, or sold. It’s a part of a rehabilitation service administered by the Justice department.

(more)



“Throughout Indian country, there is a critical need for increased funding for prevention, education, aftercare, and maintenance programs for those who use and abuse meth,” Vice President Shelly said.

Rep. Shelia Jackson Lee, (D-TX-18) asked Vice President Shelly how methamphetamine has affected youth on the Navajo. “The youth are really picking this up,” responded Vice President Shelly. “It’s available to them. They don’t know much about it, which is why we’re here asking for funding.”

The Native American Methamphetamine Enforcement and Treatment Act of 2007, was introduced by Rep. Tom Udall (D-NM-3). Rep. Udall preceded Vice President Shelly this afternoon in testimony. “These are all extremely important programs, and unfortunately, tribal governments were unintentionally left out as possible applicants for both the Hot Spots and Drug-Endangered Children programs,” said Congressman Udall.

Following today’s hearing, the Subcommittee acted to report House Bill 545 to the full House Judiciary Committee. The bill passed unanimously.

House Subcommittee Chairman Robert C. Scott (D-VA-3), in his closing statement, said to Vice President Shelly, “I apologize for the mistake in the legislation, and we’ll work to clear that up,” referring to passage of the original law last year.

Navajo Nation Washington Office Legislative Associate Randall Simons worked arduously with Anslem Roanhorse and Roslyn Begay of the Navajo Division of Health in coordinating the House testimony and data.

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