



# THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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## Navajo Vice President Ben Shelly visits Bodaway-Gap, Cameron chapters to discuss Bennett Freeze compact

**CAMERON, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly and his wife Martha finished his first week in office with trips to Bodaway-Gap Chapter on Saturday and Cameron Chapter on Sunday to discuss the recently-approved Bennett Freeze Intergovernmental Compact.

Joining the Vice President on both days was Navajo Nation Attorney General Louis Denetsosie.

The visit to Bodaway-Gap was for an appreciation dinner for out-going Navajo Nation Council Delegate Duane Tsinigine, and to commemorate the Dec. 5, 2006, signing of the federal court order to lift the 40-year-old Bennett Freeze.



*Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly shows residents of the Cameron Chapter a copy of the federal court order signed Dec. 5, 2006, to permanently lift the 40-year-old Bennett Freeze.*

Mr. Tsinigine said he was thankful to the Vice President to help lift the Bennett Freeze as a council delegate from Thoreau, N.M. He said

that now is the time for the people and community to come together to plan for

the area’s rehabilitation.

Mr. Tsinigine said that because of the people there that he became who he is, has learned to be strong, and was able to meet the state and national leaders that he did. For that, he was very happy and thankful to have served the people on the council.

At Cameron, some residents expressed concern that the Bennett Freeze was continuing because the map used was one that showed areas once frozen. The Vice President explained that the development freeze on the land is, indeed, lifted and that people will see construction occurring.



*Former Navajo Nation Council Delegate Duane Tsinigine of Bodaway-Gap receives numerous gifts from community members at his appreciation dinner on Saturday. Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly, who served alongside Mr. Tsinigine, attended the dinner for his colleague. Mr. Tsinigine plans to return to school.*

“The land is thawed out,” the Vice President said. “Let’s plan how we want to improve our lands for the sake of our children.”

Mr. Denetsosie explained to the 60 people in attendance that the negotiations to thaw the land began four years ago under former President Kelsey Begaye’s administration. He said regular meetings were held with the Hopi negotiating team in Phoenix.



***Navajo Nation Attorney General Louis Denetsosie explains points of the Navajo-Hopi Intergovernmental Compact that led to the lifting of the 40-year-old Bennett Freeze during a visit to the Cameron, Ariz., Chapter with Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly and his wife Martha on Sunday.***

He explained that despite continued rumors and misinformation, the Intergovernmental Compact will result in no land exchanges and no Navajo relocations from the Freeze area.

It was agreed that there will be no development within a half-mile of eagle nesting areas but if a resident is already there, they will not have to move.

He said the negotiators went so far as to spend time and money counting the number of eagles in the area. He said traditional Navajo healers were also consulted prior to the end of negotiations. The result was protection of religious practices by members of both tribes.

“There was a lot of thought put into it,” he said.

The residents said the door has been closed to them for 40-plus years and that they are now eager to develop businesses, build homes or herd sheep but that they need help from the Navajo Nation to expedite the necessary lease and permit process.

“The only fight we’ve had in the Cameron Chapter has been against poverty,” one woman said.

Jack Colorado, who was sworn in as Cameron’s Navajo Nation Council delegate on Tuesday, reminded the people that the federal judge signed the court order to lift the freeze only recently.

“We are thankful that the land is thawed out, and it’s a real emotional experience to me,” he said.

Local residents have received updates, he said, adding that the Navajo Nation’s attorney from Phoenix, Terry Fenzl, has come several times to discuss the Freeze and the compact.

Vice President Shelly said he and Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., would like to see plans the people come up with themselves rather than have someone else plan for them.

“This is your place,” he said. “This is where you live so you do the planning. Now we just need to move forward.”

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