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President Ben Shelly Announces Town Hall Meetings

TEEC NOS POS, Ariz.- Navajo President Ben Shelly announced that he plans to hold several town hall meetings in early February to gain insight to administer the Navajo Utah Trust Fund.

“I want my marching orders to come from the people,” he said prior to the Navajo Utah Commission meeting held Wednesday.

Though a trustee hasn’t been named to administer the fund, President Shelly said ideas regarding the money should come from the Navajo people in the Utah area.

“The Navajo Nation needs to ensure the fund’s long-term survival for the ongoing benefit of the Utah Navajos.” President Shelly stated.

President Shelly said allowing the Navajo Nation to be the trustee of the fund would fall in line with self-determination principals of the nation.

The Navajo Nation has a successful record of managing and increasing its own trust fund, has a highly developed legal system and a well-established budgeting process, the President said.

Last summer, a federal judge settled a two decade long lawsuit and awarded \$33 million to the trust fund. The lawsuit stated the state of Utah mismanaged the federally created trust fund. The fund was created in 1933.

Royalties of 37.5 percent of oil and gas revenues from 17 leases in the Aneth Extension of the Utah Navajo Trust Fund provides much needed funding for the Navajo people who reside in Utah, both on and off the Navajo Nation, President Shelly said during the meeting.

“This is a result of negotiation between the Navajo Nation, the State of Utah and the federal government,” the President added.

The Navajo Nation continues to oppose S. 1327 introduced by Utah Sen. Hatch. In the event S. 1327 is approved, Utah Navajo Trust Fund would make non-profit Utah Dineh Corporation a trustee of the fund.

Shelly warned that in the event of a breach by the non-profit, the beneficiaries would have no remedy against the corporation. Sen. Hatch's bill is the same as former Utah Sen. Bennett bill. Sen. Bennett did not consult with the Navajo Nation before submitting his bill.

"Our vision includes further consultation with the local Navajo Community interests in developing parameters of the Trust." President Shelly stated.

As of June 2011, the Utah Navajo Trust Fund had a balance of \$54 million, a portion of which came from the Pelt v. Utah settlement.

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