Navajo President Shelly and Vice President Jim Meet with BSNF for Thoreau Rail Port

GALLUP, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said the Navajo Nation is still on track to develop a 300-acre industrial park near Thoreau, which is scheduled for completion in 2014.

“We need to put the Navajo Nation in a direction of job creation and economic development,” President Shelly said during a Thursday morning meeting with Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company.

The Thoreau industrial park would also serve as a railway port.

The meeting informed various stakeholders about BSNF’s plans for development in the McKinley and San Juan County regions.

Navajo Vice President Rex Lee Jim, New Mexico Indian Affairs Secretary Art Allison, N.M. State Representatives Sharon Clahchischilliage and Patricia Lundstrom and other community leaders attended the informal meeting. LaTonya Finch, regional manager of economic development for BSNF, led the meeting.

“We need more jobs, more wealth and we have an opportunity to do that right now,” Finch said during the hour-long meeting.
Finch added that BNSF has four areas in which their railway company plans to invest to match forecasted growth. The areas included Gallup, Belen, Las Cruces and Clovis. The Gallup area also includes the Thoreau industrial park. As many 22 different companies are awaiting expansion between Gallup and Thoreau, she added.

“We got tremendous opportunity here,” she said.

Vice President Jim said the rail port in Thoreau can bridge the principles of Navajo culture and economic development.

“I believe we can have economic development while maintaining the integrity of our culture,” Vice President Jim said.

Sec. Allison said that Gov. Susana Martinez supports the Thoreau industrial park and building a railroad from the Four Corners area to Thoreau.

Products like oil, gas, coal and produce from Navajo Agriculture Products Industries would have more access to an international market, Allison said.

“Navajo Coal would be sold on the international market,” Sec. Allison said.

President Shelly informed the attendees that the Navajo Nation is working to purchase Navajo Mine from BHP- Billiton this summer and would be interested in creating a larger market base to sell coal from Navajo Mine.

“We need to do this. Let’s work together and do this,” President Shelly said.

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