



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
 February 21, 2014

## 2014 Navajo Nation Gaming Compact stalls in N.M. Senate



Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and Sen. John Pinto convene in the halls of the Roundhouse in Santa Fe while awaiting the Senate's vote on the 2014 Navajo Nation Gaming Compact. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

SANTAFE—On Feb. 19, 2014, the N.M. Senate disapproved HJR 15, the 2014 Navajo Nation Gaming Compact, by a vote of 10-31.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly expressed disappointment after the vote and said the extensive lobbying effort by the pueblos was evident in the final tally.

each of the pueblos claimed to support tribal sovereignty, but yet they voted against our compact.

“We are thankful for our Navajo leaders in the legislature for working tirelessly on this,” he added.

The Navajo Gaming Task Force was also commended for the countless hours they poured

upon deaf ears and they ultimately voted down the compact. Many senators were talking during Sen. Pinto’s statement, another issue President Shelly took note of.

“It irked me that (the senators) were so disrespectful to not only a senior member of the Senate, but a senior citizen and a World War II veteran. Navajo people are taught to respect their elders. Seeing that disrespect really bothered me,” he said.

Only days earlier, on Feb. 18, the gaming compact passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 36-30 and President Shelly was optimistic about passage in the Senate.

“I want to thank the legislators who supported the terms of our Navajo Gaming Compact. Now, we have to go back to the drawing board and see what we have to do next,” President Shelly said.

The Navajo people invested over \$250 million in the casinos and closing the doors to any of the facilities would have a damaging effect on the Nation’s budget.

In the past week, President Shelly traveled to Santa Fe four times to garner support for the compact. He met with legislators and tried to share information on Navajo gaming. His concern was the upcoming election, especially if legislators were voted out.

Such an event would mean educating the new members on the importance of the gaming compact to the Navajo Nation and an inadequate timeframe to get it approved.

However, the lobbying effort from the pueblos was intense and was ongoing since the Nation

first began negotiations for the compact.

President Shelly said the joint compact with Navajo and the pueblos was troubled early on because of staunch opposition to Navajo’s proposed number of casinos.

“Navajo is unique because of our population and our land base, which is why we needed to negotiate our compact separately. This compact was not a template for the pueblo gaming compacts with the state,” he said.

Heather Clah, legal counsel for President Shelly, said the compact was fair and that she stood firmly by its contents.

“We have a good gaming compact for the Navajo Nation and it’s unfortunate that we must now evaluate our next move,” she said.

Clah said the leadership of President Shelly was admirable throughout the process.

“The gaming task force spent over three years negotiating the compact and it basically reflected the 2007 compact, so it was puzzling why it did not pass,” she said.

“We’ll regroup and find a proper solution, that is the strength of the Navajo Nation,” President Shelly said. “We’ve worked with the pueblos and supported them in the past. We need to find common ground and not work against each other.”



**“The Navajo people will be negatively impacted by this vote, especially if we are forced to close our casinos.”**

The stakes could not have been any higher, he said, as compact affects more than 950 current gaming positions and a vital revenue stream for the Nation.

“The Navajo people will be negatively impacted by this vote, especially if we are forced to close our casinos,” President Shelly said. “It’s upsetting that

into crafting the compact over the past three years.

Before the vote, Sen. John Pinto pleaded with the Senate for approval and said the Navajo casinos employ Spanish, African-American, Anglo and Navajo workers.

“We’re going to hurt them if we close this casino,” Pinto said.

His plea with the Senate fell