



President Shelly voices concerns from Navajo Nation

Featured guest speaker at 19th Annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day



Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said Indian Country must heed the concept of T'áá hwó ájít' éego, the Navajo philosophy of self-reliance, especially in this age of federal sequestration and budget cuts. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

PHOENIX-Tribal nations across Arizona convened at the State Capitol for the 19th Annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day on Jan. 21, 2014.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly was the featured speaker for the legislative session, including Diane Enos, President of the Salt River Maricopa-Pima Indian Community and Terry Rambler, Chairman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe.

Prior to the session, President Shelly met with Sen. Carlyle Begay and students from Northern Arizona University. Delegate Walter Phelps of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council

was also in attendance.

The message from the Navajo leadership was clear and direct – obtain your education – with the encouragement to return home to improve the Nation.

President Shelly encouraged the students to be resilient and maintain focused on their goal of improving their lives. He spoke about the circle of life and said education is a large part of that process.

“Nobody can do it for you. You have to do for yourself,” President Shelly said. “You’re going to school and trying to make something of yourself. Don’t depend on somebody else.

The students also heard comments from Sen. Begay who told them, “Never forget who you are and where you come from. Never forget your heritage.”

Delegate Phelps said the Navajo Nation looks at the college students as the cream of the crop and that they will hit the ground running after they’re done with school.

“Maintain your values, your commitment and your focus. It’s your values that will keep you steady,” he said.

The Legislative Day festivities included an exhibitor fair on the Senate Lawn, where many tribal leaders and representatives from various interests mingled and conversed.

The Joint Protocol session took place in the House of Representatives and the gallery was packed with tribal members from across the state.

The Ira H. Hayes American Legion Post No. 84 posted the colors, while Miss Indian Arizona recited the pledge of allegiance.

Speaker of the House Andy Tobin and Senate President Andy Biggs provided the opening remarks before inviting President Shelly to the podium to speak.

His remarks to the body were focused on resilience and self-determination.

“The Navajo people live in the concept of T’áá hwó ájít’ éego, or self-reliance,” President Shelly said. “In this time of federal sequestration and budget cuts, this philosophy of T’áá hwó ájít’ éego is more important than ever.

“This doesn’t only apply to the Navajo Nation, but to all Indian tribes across the country,” he added.

During his address, President Shelly lauded the Navajo Nation Energy Policy of 2013 as a major accomplishment, providing the Nation with employment, economic development and continuing relations with Arizona.

“I’ve always said, what is good for Navajo is good for our neighbors,” he said.

President also reminded the legislators that the federal government has a trust responsibility to Native Americans and that they include vital revenue streams for areas such as health care and education.

He noted that North America once had 100 million Native Americans from hundreds of tribes who thrived and lived on these lands.

Where we stand today was once Indian land and I must give recognition to our host tribes of this area for allowing us into their territory – the Gila River Indian Nation, Salt River Maricopa-Pima Indian Community and the Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation, he said.

Other featured speakers and legislators echoed this sentiment for the duration of the joint session, especially SRPMIC President Enos.

President Shelly touched on the Arizona Indian Education Act, data sharing and the promotion of STEM careers for students interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

He also spoke of the importance of supporting the Transaction Privilege Tax, which is up for discussion this legislative session.

Proposed amendments to the TPT legislation would send 25 percent of all state TPT funds generated on the Navajo Nation back to the Nation, Additionally, 75 percent of TPT funds would go back to counties serving the Nation for infrastructure development.

President said the TPT efforts were in step with Navajo Nation’s efforts to retain funding from the Fuel Excise Tax that currently funnels into the state budget at an average of \$4 million per year.

“We ask that these FET funds remain on the Navajo Nation and allow us to address the 14,733 miles of road that are on the Nation,” he said. “A total of 76 percent, or 11,352 miles, are unpaved and cost the Nation and counties a large amount of money to maintain.”

President Shelly also highlighted successful government-to-government relations with Arizona, in particular, the paving of Navajo Route 20 in August 2013.

He said the \$35 million project was a tremendous effort between Navajo Division of Transportation, Arizona Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration to restore essential traffic from U.S. 89, which collapsed in Feb. 2013.

These partnerships are important because they foster intergovernmental relations and cooperation between the tribal, state and federal government for the benefit of all Americans,” President Shelly said. “We look forward to continuing positive relations with Arizona and the federal government.



President Shelly spoke with students from Northern Arizona University about the circle of life and the importance of education in the process. He said not to depend on anyone else, but to do for yourself. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



NAU students listen to advice from President Shelly, Sen. Carlyle Begay and Navajo Nation Council Delegate Walter Phelps before the start of the joint protocol session. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



The gallery of the House of Representatives was filled to capacity, as many natives from across Arizona listened in on the joint protocol session for the 19th Annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day at the State Capitol. (Photo by Rick Abasta)