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# President Shelly contrasts Treaty of 1868 to present day responsibilities

*Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly spoke during the Treaty Day Celebration in Ft. Defiance on May 31. He said the Treaty of 1868 changed the mindset of Navajo people, who previously employed the philosophy of T'áá hwó ájít éego, or self-reliance. He said the Navajo Nation must return back to those teachings from our Navajo elders and that the federal government must live up to their trust responsibilities outlined in the treaty. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*

FT. DEFIANCE, Ariz.—Under a cloudless sky and blazing hot sun, tribal leaders and local community members gathered to commemorate an event central to the Navajo people's survival.

On May 31, the community of Ft. Defiance gathered to celebrate Treaty Day with a reenactment of the Treaty of 1868 signing, guest speakers and a barbecue luncheon.

More than 100 people gathered at the Bureau of Indian Affairs Park near the old hospital to participate in the festivities.

The Treaty of 1868 guaranteed more than freedom for the Navajo people. It created another way of life for the Navajo people and new responsibilities for the federal government.

***Hweeldi Ba Hane'***

The Long Walk of 1864 began with the scorched earth tactics of Kit Carson, who burned Navajo crops and killed livestock in order to force Navajos into surrender.

As Navajos surrendered, they eventually began the 400-mile journey to Ft. Sumner in southeastern N.M. Scores of Navajos died along the way, many of them elders and children.

They suffered internment at Ft. Sumner and many lives were lost during the time of Navajo history known as *Hweeldi*. The Long Walk changed the lives of Navajo people for the generations that followed.

*T'áá hwó* ájít éego, or self-reliance, was the mindset of many Navajo people before the Long Walk. After the return back home, that philosophy was changed into dependence upon the government and the reluctance from federal officials to live up to trust responsibilities guaranteed in the Treaty of 1868.

***T'áá hwó ájít éego***

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly has long since said we need to return to that traditional lifestyle of doing for ourselves because

nobody will do it for us.

President Shelly was keynote speaker and began by acknowledging the lives lost at *Hweeldi* and said it was because of their sacrifice that Navajo people were alive today and thriving.

"When the Navajo people returned from *Hweeldi*, we had to start over again. Homes had to be rebuilt. Crops had to be replanted. We had to learn to live under the federal rules and regulations," President Shelly said.

Today, he said the Navajo Nation is 300,000 strong and still growing.

"Our sovereignty and strength is in our language, *Diné bizaad*. The Navajo language saved this country from war, through the heroics of our Navajo Code Talkers," he said.

**Breach of Trust**

On Friday, President Shelly signed legislation into law that ended the litigation against the federal government for breach of trust in safeguarding Navajo Nation trust fund assets. These assets included mineral right royalties from coal, oil and gas.

The Navajo Nation will receive $554 million in an agreement that ends the litigation that has been in court since Dec. 29, 2006.

"I want the priorities for this $554 million to go toward housing, infrastructure, scholarships and accessibility for our disabled Navajo citizens," President Shelly said.

Because of limited funding, budget cuts and diminishing mineral royalties, President Shelly said he has been fiscally conservative with the Nation's money, often executing the line item veto to trim spending.

The funding from the lawsuit will change all of that.

"With this half-a-billion dollar surplus, I will begin loosening these line item vetoes so that projects can be funded," he said. "All I ask is that our legislators follow the proper tribal law and processes for their projects."

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The Executive and Legislative Branches of government will begin meeting to plan for the money, he said, and that a 120-day review period will begin for the prioritization of projects.

"*T'áá hwó* ájít éego. That is what our elders taught us when they returned from *Hweeldi*. Let's continue moving forward with self-determination for our future generations," President Shelly said.

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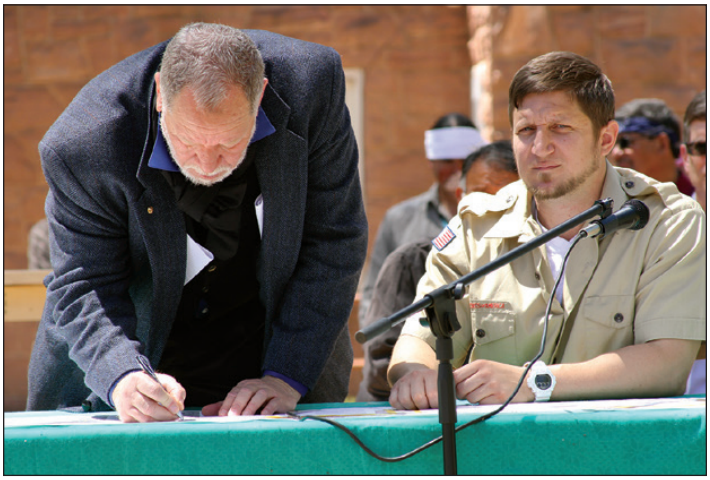
***Community members from Ft. Defiance and various parts of the Navajo Nation volunteered their time to participate in the reenactment of the treaty signing. They murmured and expressed happiness during the signing, as many of the Navajo chiefs did during the actual signing in 1864. (Photo by Rick Abasta)***

***Performing in the role of Barboncito was Bronco Martinez, a Navajo musician and performer from Mariano Lake., N.M. His performance as the Navajo Chief Barboncito was a hit with the crowd. (Photo by Rick Abasta)***



***Errol Valteau, a Ft. Defiance resident, played the role of Gen. Sherman. He's pictured here signing the treaty, as witnessed by Stephen Fabina, another local resident playing the role of a government official. (Photo by Rick Abasta)***