WASHINGTON, D.C. — Providing affordable mobile communications on the Navajo Nation is a challenge. Navajo people now have another wireless provider to choose from for services.

Last week, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly met with the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C. regarding Navajo Tribal Utility Authority Wireless, LLC and telecommunications on the Nation.

Telecommunications is an important component of the five pillars of nation building for the Shelly-Jim administration, specifically with regard to infrastructure development.

The FCC issued an order on Feb. 18, 2014, designating NTUA Wireless as an eligible telecommunications carrier on the Navajo Nation.

NTUA Wireless’ designation as a limited ETC for Lifeline Service and conditional ETC status to participate in Tribal Mobility Fund Phase I is another major step toward connectivity in rural parts of the Nation.

The ETC designation was an exercise in Navajo sovereignty, especially with regard to jurisdictional authority.

President Shelly lauded the designation and the efforts of Brian Tagaban, executive director of the Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission for their work with the FCC.

“Telecommunications and technology is our priority,” said President Shelly, who championed broadband as vice president. “We dedicated our efforts and formed a broadband team, that worked to completion, creating a middle and last mile network for the future.”

The FCC order stated “NTUA Wireless is Navajo owned and submits to the jurisdiction over its operations by the NNTRC. Therefore, we find that NTUA Wireless is a tribally-owned commercial mobile radio service provider subject to the laws and jurisdiction of the tribal authority of the Navajo Nation.”

“The NNTRC is specifically...
Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and Vice President Rex Lee Jim traveled to Capitol Hill last week to share concerns from the Navajo Nation with federal officials and congressional members. (Photo by Jared King)

Clara Pratt, executive director of the Navajo Nation Washington Office joined President Shelly and Brian Tagaban in a meeting with the FCC last week in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Jared King)

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly, along with Brian Tagaban, executive director of the Navajo Telecommunications Regulatory Commission and Deswood Tome, special advisor to the president, spoke with FCC Chief Geoffrey Blackwell on Feb. 18, 2014 about the NTUA Wireless designation. (Photo by Rick Abasta)