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## President Shelly reports before joint session of N.M. Senate



President Shelly reported before the Senate in a joint session with the House on Feb. 11 in Santa Fe. He also spoke before the House Agriculture, Wildlife and Water Committee in opposition to HB 291. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

SANTA FE—On Feb. 11, President Shelly spent the day at the Roundhouse to speak on behalf of the Navajo Nation on a number of issues.

During the Indian Day festivities on Feb. 6, President Shelly and a number of other tribal leaders from N.M. did not get to speak to the legislature. Instead, Gov. Susana Martinez spoke and provided an update from the state.

Sen. Michael Sanchez invited President Shelly and other tribal leaders to attend the Senate's session on Feb. 11 to speak on issues from their respective nations. Members from the House were also invited to join, so they could also hear the concerns from the tribes.

The invitation was a chance to makeup for the faux pas from the previous week.

The president began his report with an update on the Navajo Beef initiative. The project allows Navajo ranchers an opportunity to sell their cattle at

market value or better, which is then served as steaks at Navajo casinos.

He said the beef is of premium grade and can be made available for pueblo casinos as well. Such a partnership would strengthen tribal relations and foster unity, he added.

"It was some of the finest steak I've ever had," President Shelly said. "And I asked our gaming people to maybe invite some of our senators and representatives to taste some of that beef."

Other economic development initiatives were mentioned.

President Shelly encouraged the legislature to support the Thoreau rail spur along Highway 371 via a two-line rail system for the transport of goods and services from the Four Corners to the transcontinental rail line.

He thanked the state for funding the feasibility study on the rail spur and said its completion would be another successful exercise in economic development.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe has committed \$8 million for two rail loops that will accommodate 100 rail cars for each loop. Not only would the project increase gross revenue receipts for the tribe, state and county, but it would also temper the relationships between the respective governments.

"These are meaningful partnership ideas we need to continue with the growth we have created," President Shelly said.

During his term of office, 2,440 new jobs were added and the president said the Thoreau rail port would be an opportunity to create more N.M. jobs.

The Tribal Infrastructure Fund and capital outlay funding was another area of concern shared by President Shelly. He said the importance of the funding cannot be stressed enough, especially since they're often use to leverage other funding to complete projects.

He thanked the House and Senate for providing funding all these years for tribal infrastructure development and noted that conventional wisdom dictates that the state foster tribal efforts for self-determination.

To make such self-sufficiency possible, President Shelly encouraged the legislators to approve the Navajo Nation gaming compact with the state.

He said that Navajo gaming provides employment, taxes, revenue and other business opportunities with vendors that are crucial to Navajo self-determination.

"We need your support," President Shelly said.

Gaming provides tribes

the opportunity to generate funds independently, the president said, adding that the Navajo Nation supported early gaming compacts from pueblos operating casinos.

"It takes us working side-by-side. We all share this great state as neighbors," President Shelly said. "On behalf of the Navajo Nation, I wish you success in this legislative session of 2015."

Earlier the same day, the president also reported before the House Agriculture, Water and Wildlife Committee to voice his opposition to House Bill 291.

Sponsored by Rep. Yvette Herrell, the bill is related to public lands for the creation of the N.M. Federal Land Management Commission.

The fact that tribes and pueblos of N.M. are not involved with the formation of the proposed commission, there are serious concerns from the Navajo Nation, the president said.

"We are alarmed because the State of New Mexico could easily sell such lands to private interests, even out-of-state interests," President Shelly said.

The potential for the state to sell public lands held sacred by tribes is too great, he maintained, especially with the recent fight to get the traditional cultural property designation for Mount Taylor after private interests attempted to open the mountain up to uranium mining.

"Further, House Bill 291 does not address the government-to-government agreements in place that we have to manage federal lands, nor does it address federal laws and policies tribes utilize to relate to the federal government," President Shelly said.