



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 27, 2015

President Shelly meets with Congressional delegation, discusses ONHIR



Top, President Shelly reports to the Congressional delegation from Washington, D.C. that traveled to Ariz. to investigate ONHIR. Bottom, Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick said she understood the native plight. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.— On Jan. 24 and 25, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly met a Congressional delegation in Window Rock to discuss the Office of Navajo Hopi Indian Relocation.

Congressional members of the U.S. House of Representatives representing the House Appropriations Committee and Subcommittees on the Interior and Environment traveled to Ariz. to meet with the Navajo Nation

and Hopi Tribe.

Rep. Ken Calvert (R-Calif.), Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID), Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), Rep. Betty McCollum (DFL-Minn.) and Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-Ariz.) met with President Shelly and members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council to discuss the Office of the Inspector General report on the federal relocation program administered by ONHIR.

Jodi Gillete, Senior Policy Advisor for Native American

Affairs for the White House Domestic Policy Council joined the delegation. The federal delegation toured the Nahata Dzil community and families in Jeddito to see the firsthand results of relocation.

President Shelly explained the countless socio-economic disparities that resulted from lack of infrastructure and economic development. Before being relocated, many of the Navajo families were self-reliant and maintained a healthy lifestyle through livestock and farming.

However, relocation has disrupted that lifestyle and many entered into a modern world that they had no experience in.

“Our history is tied up in the land that you see,” President Shelly said. “The relocation of Navajos from land they lived on created traumatic ripples that continue to disrupt and destroy lives 41 years later.

“These people lost their homes, their heritage and their livelihood,” he added.

Still today, many families have not received compensation. Others, mostly elderly, are forced to go before ONHIR in Flagstaff and are often subject to interrogation to establish benefits. Far too often, these individuals are denied benefits and have to endure a review process to overturn the decision.

“This costly and unjust process puts added stress on our people and only increases the cost of relocation,” said the president.

For families that have not been relocated, the tremendous needs for infrastructure development and roads continue to dominate. Other considerations include the deteriorating school facilities, in spite of 2004 commitments by the federal government to replace 14 schools.

“The Little Singer Community School which you will see later today, is one of the last schools on the 2004 replacement school construction priority listing,” President Shelly said.

He noted that Navajo children learn better when traditional culture and language are supplanted in their curriculum.

Although the two-day meeting and tour of the Navajo Nation was brief, President Shelly strongly advocated for the continued funding of ONHIR and recommended addressing the pitfalls of the accommodation agreement entered into by the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe.

He also shared issues impacting families in the former Bennett Freeze area, where time has stood still for more than four decades. Families in the impacted area continue to live without running water, roads and substandard housing.

“Some families are forced to live in camper shells. I hope the subcommittee has listened to our concerns and will provide us with a favorable outcome,” President Shelly said.

