



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 9, 2015

President Shelly to report before N.M. Legislature on gaming compact



President Shelly whispers to Speaker LoRenzo Bates last week during the N.M. Senate session. They lobbied for passage of the compact. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

SANTA FE—For the past week, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly has been on standby to meet with state legislators at the Roundhouse on the renewal of the Navajo Nation gaming compact with the state of N.M.

The president and members of the tribal council met with legislators on March 5 and attended the session for the N.M. Senate to advocate for passing the gaming compact. The next day, President Shelly and other tribal leaders met again to discuss provisions in the compact and the need for tribes to reach an agreement with the state.

“The importance of passing this gaming compact cannot be stressed enough,” President Shelly said. “This has been a long and tedious negotiations

process with the state.

“Thousands of jobs are at stake for the Nation and we implore our state legislators to get this compact passed for the benefit of all New Mexicans,” he added.

The Navajo Nation stepped into the Indian gaming arena in 2003 with the state of N.M.

Five years later, Fire Rock Casino opened in Gallup. A year later, Flowing Water Casino opened for business, as the Navajo Nation’s only Class II gaming facility. Three years later, Northern Edge Casino opened in Upper Fruitland.

The term of the tribe’s initial contract with the state ends on June 30, 2015.

It has been more than seven years for the Navajo Nation to get to

this level of approval. In 2009, negotiations began with former Gov. Bill Richardson, but talks ended after his term of office concluded. In 2012, talks began with Gov. Susana Martinez.

The Navajo Nation has approximately 115,472 enrolled tribal members residing concurrently on the Navajo Nation and in the state of N.M., and more than 2 million acres of land within the state. With an unemployment rate above 50 percent, gaming has been crucial to providing jobs to Navajos.

There were 950 jobs created through gaming, 90 percent of which are Navajo employees. When the per capita income of the Navajo Nation hovers around \$8,000 per year, these jobs in the gaming industry make a difference for Navajo families struggling to survive.

Fifty-seven of the 110 chapters of the Navajo Nation are located within N.M. Gaming revenues in excess of \$75 million have been generated by the casinos in N.M.

Fire Rock makes \$35 million annually in revenue and Northern Edge generates \$40 million in

revenue.

President Shelly said, “The Navajo Nation has negotiated in good faith a gaming compact that would serve the needs of the Navajo Nation and the state.”

He said gaming jobs not only provide income and revenue from taxes, but an opportunity for tribal members to grow into an industry providing professional white collar careers in addition to the service industry positions associated with gaming.

“The revenue from our Navajo casinos funnel back into the tribal government to provide direct services to Navajo people. This was the intent of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act: Self-determination,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly and other tribal leaders are expected to report before the N.M. Legislature this week for consideration of the gaming compact. In addition to the Navajo Nation, the compact includes other “2001 Tribes” such as Acoma, Jicarilla, Mescalero and Pojoaque Pueblos.

