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## **President Shelly Testifies at the U.S. House of Representatives to Support the Navajo Nation's Budget Priorities**

**Washington, D.C.**—President Ben Shelly testified before the Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, U.S. House of Representatives yesterday. During the Native American Public Witness Days hearing, he urged the Interior Subcommittee to maintain the Navajo Nation's budget recommendations for FY2012, aimed at priorities such as infrastructure development, energy, health, public safety, and education.

President Shelly's statement follows:

Statement of Ben Shelly, President  
The Navajo Nation  
Before The House Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives

Native American Public Witness Days

May 3, 2011

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

*Ya'at'eeh.* Good morning. I am Ben Shelly, President of the Navajo Nation. To provide for the overall prosperity of our community, we ask your committee to work with us and support the following priorities in your Interior budget: infrastructure development, energy, health, public safety, and education.

### **The Navajo Nation**

I represent the Navajo Nation. We have a unique relationship with the federal government. We hope to further our relationship as recognized by the *Navajo Treaty of 1868*. Your committee can help fulfill the treaty obligations and other promises made over our mutual history.

## **Navajo Supports Job creation through Infrastructure and Energy Development**

Infrastructure development is a key to job creation. For this reason the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project (NIIP) needs full funding. NIIP stimulates the economy in the region. In the proposed 2012 federal budget, NIIP funding was reduced to \$4 million without consulting with the Navajo Nation. Congress has passed a law and promised to fund NIIP in its entirety, which is estimated to cost \$500 million to complete. Congress should restore the funding for NIIP to \$26 million per year for the next 10 years.

The Navajo Nation supports other infrastructure projects. The Navajo-Gallup Water Pipeline is an infrastructure project that will supply water to residents in the region and stimulate farming and agribusiness. Additionally, the Nation is working to develop our vast energy resources for job creation.

## **Support Hospital Facilities Construction Priority List**

Health facility construction funding is critical in our remote but populated areas. The Nation has five projects on the existing IHS health construction priority list whose costs exceed, in total, \$1 billion dollars. Funding shortfalls will delay the building of these needed projects. We support funding this line item at the 2010 levels.

## **Public Safety and Justice Services**

Two hundred and ninety Navajo Nation law enforcement officers patrol our vast reservation that is equal to the size West Virginia. There is one police officer for every 1,000 residents, each patrolling a region of up to 5,000 square miles. Public safety requires full funding at approximately \$55 million dollars. Further, the proposed 2012 federal budget includes cuts to facility construction which funds jail replacements and employee housing. These cuts will impact the safety of our community. We support funding at the 2010 levels.

## **Education**

Facility and school construction programs were eliminated in the proposed 2012 federal budget. The Nation has many substandard school facilities that need replacement to provide a safe learning environment. School construction dollars need to be restored to the 2010 funding levels.

Annually, the Navajo Nation receives about 13,000 applicants, and only half are awarded funding to assist with higher education costs. We request an additional \$25 million for these education costs. The full restoration of the Pell Grant, Carl Perkins funding and other educational resources will ensure that Navajo students contribute to the American workforce.

## **Conclusion**

The annual federal budget provides essential needs to Indian Country. We request that this Subcommittee honor your treaty obligations and support our budget recommendations for FY 2012.

*Ahe'hee, thank you.*

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