

Speaker Morgan, Vice President Shelly put Navajo people first to save New Mexico funds

Both tribal leaders display leadership as they plan to continue working together on behalf of the Navajo people

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan and Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly met Feb. 2 at the Office of the Speaker to discuss issues affecting the Navajo people. In a show of genuine cooperation, the two tribal leaders and their respective offices will continue working together to expedite projects in the coming year.

Both tribal leaders will arrive together at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe on Feb. 5 for New Mexico Indian Day to show their support for various proposed legislations to keep capital improvement funds intact.

One immediate project involves saving Navajo Nation Capital Outlay funds in the state of New Mexico .

Currently, there are 2,596 New Mexico projects in the New Mexico Capital Outlay Solvency Bill. Of this amount, 161 projects totaling nearly \$10 million on the New Mexico portion of the Navajo Nation is in jeopardy of being de-authorized due to budget deficits the state is experiencing.

There are 92 Navajo Nation projects totaling more than \$3 million that have been agreed to be de-authorized and 63 Navajo projects totaling more than \$6.1 million that are being contested and taken out of the Solvency Bill. There are also 17 Navajo Nation projects that have third party agreements and should be taken off the Solvency Bill as well, leaving 46 projects totaling nearly \$4 million that do not have binding agreements.

Speaker Morgan and Vice President Shelly will work together to save at least 63 essential projects totaling more than \$6.1 million for the Navajo Nation. These projects are either in their planning stages or working their way through the system. These projects are at high risk of being lost if the Navajo Nation does nothing to try and save the funding.

The Tribal Infrastructure Fund (TIF) is one area needing urgent attention as well. Another urgent issue is funding of Navajo projects in the state of New Mexico coming from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

As a solution, several state legislators are sponsoring four different legislations to prevent funds from being reverted and to keep Navajo Nation projects from being de-authorized through Senate Bill 182, sponsored by Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros (D).

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Speaker Morgan and Vice President Shelly, along with their staff, will work to keep the funds. One goal is to gain the support of Gov. Bill Richardson.

"We need the support of the state's leadership, especially Governor Richardson, Lt. Governor Diane Denish and House Speaker Ben Lujan," Speaker Morgan said. "One thing the New Mexico Legislature and the state's leadership need to understand is that the Navajo Nation is unique. Our projects are not like other local government projects – like county and city projects. Our projects are not designed to beautify buildings or what not. Our Navajo projects are projects that are for survival of our people, to satisfy our basic needs. That is what we call putting people first and we will continue fighting for their basic needs."

Ben Shelly said the Navajo Nation should support all four legislations to keep Navajo Nation funds.

"I plan to work with the Intergovernmental Relations Committee and Speaker Morgan," Shelly said. "We need to prioritize roads and health-related projects. That's what we should be advocating. These are health-related issues -- we have to fight for that."

Speaker Morgan agreed.

"It is very important that we speak in unity to save vital projects for the Navajo people," Speaker Morgan said. "It is also important we work closely with the state legislators to save these projects."

"I want to work with you all," Shelly said to Speaker Morgan. "I will go where you need me to, we need to show unity. Wherever you are Speaker, I want to be there as well."

The two tribal leaders also plan to continue work on various projects dealing with economic development and in creating jobs for the Navajo Nation. Some possible ideas include expanding and creating industrial growth areas. Both tribal leaders displayed leadership as they plan to continue working together on behalf of the Navajo people.

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