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Vice President Shelly Meets with Senator Barak Obama

RAPID CITY, S.D.—Vying for the core support of the largest Native American tribe Sen. Barak Obama met on Saturday with Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly at a town hall meeting with the candidate.

“I was very pleased to meet with Senator Obama,” said Vice President Shelly. “I was not there to make an endorsement,” said the vice president, “but instead to show Senator Obama what Navajo is doing and to instead ask for his support.”

Vice President Shelly joined Oglala Sioux President John Yellow Bird Steele during the meeting with the presidential candidate, where the vice president talked about some of today’s challenges and how important youth are to the future of the Navajo Nation. During their conversation, he said the Navajo people need jobs and economic prosperity to bring younger technical school and college graduates back to Navajo.

“We have the largest land base and the largest population. We also have the manpower and an intellectual community made up of recent graduates to fuel a self-sufficient Nation,” said Vice President Shelly.

Vice President Shelly also gave an overview of issues important to the Navajo Nation, such as investing in energy, bettering healthcare for Navajos and Navajo veterans, and building on economic business initiatives.

“I expressed to Senator Obama we’re building our economy but we have challenges with basic infrastructure,” said Vice President Shelly. “We know the federal government can assist. During my visit, I gave him a point-of-reference list on our issues,” said Vice President Shelly. “Our emphasis on renewable energy got his attention. He said he views renewable energy as an opportunity to create economic development in rural tribal communities.”

The Vice President also mentioned the need for rehabilitating infrastructure for the Bennett Freeze residents, significantly increasing funding for jail and court facilities, and supporting Navajo water rights and infrastructure initiatives.



Vice President Shelly's meeting followed with a Rapid City town hall meeting for residents of South Dakota where hundreds were gathered to meet the candidate.

Vice President Shelly was accompanied by Arbin Mitchell, Navajo Community Development executive director, and Sherrick Roanhorse, a senior staff assistant to the vice president. "I think now is an opportune time for Native Americans to hear from presidential candidates, to get a view of their strategic plans on how they can better Indian Country," said Mitchell.

During Obama's town hall meeting, Navajo physician and tobacco prevention researcher, Dr. Patricia Nez-Henderson, asked Senator Obama about how he could better healthcare for Native Americans.

"We've got to get more money into the system," said Sen. Obama in his meeting with Vice President Shelly. "Part of what we need to do is make sure Indian Health Services is doing what our healthcare system needs to do, which is to emphasize prevention. So many of the problems Native Americans face are treatable illnesses. If we are helping with regular check-ups, regular screenings...then we will actually save money on the long term because people will be healthier.

In his talk, Sen. Obama also mentioned his support for screening new out-of-combat veterans for mental illnesses like Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr. endorsed Sen. Hillary Clinton for president earlier this year. Vice President Shelly's meetings with Senators McCain and Obama were by invitation.

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