



## THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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# Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., DPA officials meet protesters occupying Desert Rock Project site

**NENAHNEZAD, N.M.** – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., spent two-and-a-half hours here Monday to hear the concerns of about two dozen protesters now occupying the planned Desert Rock Energy Project site.

The President said he went to the site to listen and to explain the Navajo Nation's position in support of the now-\$3 billion project. The President said the Desert Rock project has been discussed for years, was supported by the Navajo Nation Council last summer with a 66-to-7 vote to grant a lease and sub-lease, and will provide employment for 1,000 Navajo construction workers through the year 2010.

"My people are struggling and want to work on this to bring something good for my people," President Shirley said. "I will continue to work on this to try to help my people. I have a heart for my people. I am aware of the suffering they encounter and the need for jobs."

Once the power plant is operational, it will provide an estimated 400 permanent jobs, millions of dollars in revenue for the Navajo Nation, and generate ancillary businesses that will greatly boost the Navajo Nation's economy.

President Shirley said people have been given many opportunities to express concerns through numerous public hearings and through the media. He said more opportunities will come through the comment period on

the environmental impact study that needs to be completed for the project.



*DPA General Manager Steven Begay discusses the permits granted to DPA and Sithe Global to conduct test drilling on the Desert Rock Energy Project site where protesters have established a camp to block the testing work. Mr. Begay gave copies of the permits to Lori Goodman, director of the environment group Diné CARE which is helping to stage the protest.*

Officials for the Diné Power Authority have said that on the one hand, environmental organizations are demanding that an EIS be completed as soon as possible and, on the other, these protesters are preventing work from being completed on the EIS.

President Shirley told the protesters that completion of the project remains the desire of the majority of the Navajo people.

The protesters began their camp to block the work one week ago, stating that they wanted to see completed permits that allow the drilling of a well to proceed. Toward the end of Monday's meeting, DPA General Manager Steven Begay, who accompanied President Shirley, handed copies of the permits to Lori Goodman, director of the environmental group Diné CARE, who is serving as one of the spokespersons for the protesters.

Sarah Jane White, a spokesperson for Dooda Desert Rock, told the President that Navajo Nation officials are failing to inform the people and are deceiving them. She offered no alternative to the current protest situation or the project in general other than to stop the Desert Rock Energy Project completely.

The President said everyone from grazing and chapter officials, council delegates and chapter residents have been fully briefed on the project, and that he didn't believe anyone was being deceived. He said there continues to be more support for the project than opposition to it because of the benefits it will bring to the entire Navajo Nation.

He said residents in the rural areas of the Navajo Nation are continually asking for assistance, employment and economic development, and this is an important way to bring them to improve the great need that exists.

He said that the proposed project will use the cleanest coal technology available today, will produce significantly less harmful air emissions, and will use only 10 percent of the water used in conventional power plants.

Revenues from the project will enable the Navajo Nation to bring waterline and powerline extensions to people who have sought them for years, improve the quality of life for thousands, and relieve suffering, President Shirley said.

George Arthur, Navajo Nation Council delegate for Burnham, San Juan, and Nenanezad, and chairman of the Resources Committee, said he has not missed any chapter meetings but has not seen some of the environmental group representatives at those meetings. He said two of the chapters he represents have passed resolutions to support the project, one opposed it, and that he voted against it, but that the project has been discussed openly and truthfully.

Jerry Bodie, council delegate representing Sanostee, thanked President Shirley for coming. He said it was his understanding also that the project had been approved up to this point.

Sam Benally, a Burnham grazing official, told the gathering that he knows all the land users and permit holders, and that three of those needed to give their consent for the project, which they did. He said they were notified, informed and ultimately gave their approval.

DPA officials reiterated that they had the authority from the area grazing permit holders to proceed with the project. Among the permits were test drilling permits, water monitoring permits, and water use permits reviewed and signed by the local chapter grazing committee official, the local council delegate, the water code administrator and a representative of the Department of Water Resources.

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