

House Engrossed

Ben Shelly; death resolution

State of Arizona
House of Representatives
Fifty-sixth Legislature
First Regular Session
2023

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 2051

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

ON THE DEATH OF BEN SHELLY.

(TEXT OF BILL BEGINS ON NEXT PAGE)

1 Ben Shelly, former Navajo Nation president, passed away on March 22,
2 2023 at the age of 75.

3 Born on July 6, 1947, Ben Shelly grew up in Thoreau, New Mexico. He
4 is of the Tó'aheedlínii clan born for Ts'ah Yísk'ídnii. When he was
5 born, he was told by elders that he would be a great leader, which would
6 later come to fruition.

7 Ben Shelly lived in Chicago, Illinois for 16 years, training in
8 heavy equipment maintenance and working as a supervisor for a heavy
9 equipment company. Focused on transportation, he moved back to the Navajo
10 Nation in 1976 where he owned a fleet maintenance and mechanic shop.
11 Mr. Shelly entered public life in 1990, serving as chairman of the Dineh
12 Rights Association. He went on to become a Navajo Nation Council delegate
13 beginning in 1991, serving on the Transportation and Intergovernmental
14 Relations Committees and chairing the Budget and Finance Committee where
15 he helped to establish the Navajo Veterans Trust Fund with more than \$80
16 million. With the foresight he was known for, Mr. Shelly also campaigned
17 for legalized gambling in Navajo areas. He later served as a McKinley
18 County commissioner, concentrating on his area of expertise:
19 transportation.

20 An innate leader, Mr. Shelly helped form a Native American coalition
21 of officials from Arizona, Utah and New Mexico, giving them greater
22 negotiating power. He served on the United States Centers for Medicare
23 and Medicaid Services Tribal Technical Advisory Group, leading efforts to
24 amend Medicaid laws to ensure that a Certificate of Indian Blood could be
25 used to verify U.S. citizenship. A fierce supporter of his people, he
26 represented the Navajo Nation in budget discussions and formulations for
27 federally funded programs, led a delegation in consultative budget
28 deliberations with the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and worked
29 with the New Mexico state legislature and governor's office to fund
30 capital improvement projects on the Navajo Nation.

31 A bold and courageous trailblazer known for his passionate speeches,
32 Mr. Shelly was elected Navajo Nation vice president in 2006. At the time
33 of his selection, his running mate, Joe Shirley, Jr., said "he is down to
34 earth and knows the heart of the people." In 2010, Mr. Shelly won the
35 election for president, becoming the first New Mexican Navajo to become
36 president and the first sitting vice president to ascend to the
37 presidency. Mr. Shelly had extensive knowledge of the Navajo Nation's
38 finances and an intricate understanding of the financial needs and
39 challenges of each of its executive divisions. He led the Navajo Nation
40 with an agenda of economic prosperity, infrastructure, open government,
41 health and education.

42 Placing an emphasis on energy and technology, during his tenure as
43 president Mr. Shelly signed an agreement with two renowned United States
44 Department of Energy laboratories, approved the first solar farm on the
45 Navajo Nation and renewed a major energy lease. During this time, the

1 Navajo Nation also adopted a comprehensive energy policy, replacing a
2 previous policy enacted in 1978. Mr. Shelly made technology a priority
3 with the creation of a data center and the deployment of a fiber network
4 across the Navajo Nation. He was influential and active in state and
5 national politics, including serving as an advisor to the United States
6 Department of Homeland Security and working closely with tribal leaders in
7 asserting sovereignty, nationhood for tribes and progressive development.

8 Remembered for his great sense of humor and love for his community
9 and family, Mr. Shelly's experience and career prepared him with the
10 knowledge, tools, insights and understanding to serve exceptionally well
11 as vice president and then president of the Navajo Nation. He built his
12 reputation on advocating for ambitious infrastructure projects, policies
13 focused on public health and methods of boosting the Navajo people's
14 economic status. His legacy of commitment and passion earned him the
15 respect of all who had the opportunity to know and work with him.

16 Ben Shelly is survived by his wife of 57 years, Martha, five
17 children, 12 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

18 Therefore

19 Be it resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of Arizona,
20 the Senate concurring:

21 That the Members of the Legislature express their regret at the
22 passing of former President Ben Shelly and extend their deepest sympathies
23 to his surviving family members.