

Former Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly passes away

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Former Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly, 75, passed away from a long term illness March 22.

Shelly was from Thoreau, and he was elected in 2010, and assumed office Jan. 11, 2011. With the Navajo Nation Council being reorganized from an 88 member legislative body to 24, the president took office with a new government structure. He was given an additional referendum approval of a 'line item veto' power to red line budget measures approved by the Navajo Nation Council.

Although the former president lost his re-election bid in the 2014 primary election, he was sworn into a second term Jan. 13, 2015, holding the presidency for five more months.

Shelly was the first sitting vice president to be elected president. He was also the second leader from the New Mexico side of the Navajo Nation to be elected, following Chairman Paul Jones of Naschitti. Chairman Sam Ahkeah from Gadii'ahi-To'koi served as vice chairman from 1943 to 1947. Ahkeah was the first vice chairman to be elected chairman in 1946.

The former president served as vice president from 2007 to his inauguration as president in 2011. He served in the Navajo Nation Council for 16 years representing Thoreau. While on the Council he served on the Community Development and Transportation Committee, the Economic Development Committee, and the Budget and Finance as committee chairman.

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Other public service includes eight years as county commissioner for McKinley County which ran concurrent to his service in the Navajo Nation Council.

The former President was married for 57 years to Martha Shelly, originally of Coyote Canyon. They have five adult children, 12 grandchildren, and three great grandchildren.

The president remained active in Navajo leadership after stepping down from office. He and his family ran a transportation business for the last seven years.

The family will be holding a private service for the former president. A public memorial will be planned at a future date.

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