

Navajo President Endorses Clinton for President

By Felicia Fonseca/
Associated Press

The leader of the country's largest Indian reservation threw his support behind New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton on Thursday, saying she would best protect tribal sovereignty.

"We want so much to have Washington, whoever is the president, whoever is living in the White House, the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Senate, we want them to recognize that, and I believe that Sen. Hillary Clinton has recognized that," Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr. told The Associated Press ahead of a radio announcement.

Shirley's decision comes on the heels of an endorsement of Clinton by former Navajo leader Peterson Zah, who also praised Clinton for understanding the key issue of tribal sovereignty.

For Shirley, sovereignty is sacred and in the simplest terms, means independence. But it also includes keeping the Navajo culture, ceremonies, language and way of life alive.

Clinton "assures us that she is going to protect our sovereignty, she is going to stand up for our sovereignty, she is going to recognize it," Shirley said.

"The government-to-government relationship is going to continue," he said. "But what Native America likes to see is nation-to-nation, and I think that's what I see in her presidency."

Shirley said he believes Clinton also will stand up for the Navajo Nation when it comes to health care and obtaining funding from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs.

He also praised her plan to withdraw troops from Iraq, saying the money spent on the war is needed here, not there. Clinton has said she would bring troops home within 60 days of assuming the presidency.

"To talk about economic downturn here in the states and we're possibly going into a recession," Shirley said. "What's doing that to us? What I think is doing that is these wars that we're fighting across the big waters. Get us out of it so we can start using some moneys here."

Shirley said Clinton and her husband, former President Bill Clinton, are familiar with the Navajo people. While president, Bill Clinton visited Shiprock to encourage economic development in depressed areas.

The former first lady visited the reservation in 1992 and rode in the Navajo Nation parade with Zah. She also signed the guest book at the Tuba City, Ariz., trading post.

"She knows the people, she's visited with the people," Shirley said. "She shook a lot of hands with leadership, my grandmas, my grandpas."