



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **President Begaye attempts to redefine the voice of the people through line-item veto authority**

*Council urges President to seek compromise with Council*

**WINDOW ROCK** – Several members of the Navajo Nation Council responded to misleading comments from President Russell Begaye issued in a press release from the Office of the President and Vice President on Wednesday, concerning a legislation that seeks to override the president’s veto of Resolution CO-46-15 that contains language to clarify the president’s line-item veto authority.

CO-46-15 included an amendment introduced by Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), regarding the president’s line-item veto authority, which stated, “The veto of a budget line-item shall only be to the numeric appropriated dollar amount.”

Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), who is sponsoring the legislation to override the veto, said the purpose of the amendment is to clarify the purpose of the line-item veto authority.

“We are not attempting to limit the authority granted by the Navajo people. We are clarifying the original intent of the line-item authority, which is to prevent excessive spending of public funds,” stated Delegate Shepherd, who

Delegate Shepherd also stated that three presidents have exercised the line-item veto authority with no clear definitions in place, and that President Begaye is attempting to define the authority on his own.

The line-item veto authority was granted through a referendum in 2009, giving the president the authority to veto “budget line items” in the annual budget and supplemental appropriations. However, President Begaye exercised the authority to line-item veto six Conditions of Appropriations included in the Navajo Nation’s FY2016 Comprehensive Budget, which was approved by the Council in September.

Delegate Shepherd and Delegate Tsosie said that “budget line items” refer to appropriations or dollar amounts and not to legislative language such as Conditions of Appropriations.

“President Begaye is shying away from accountability,” stated Delegate Tsosie. “The Council has the authority to approve Conditions of Appropriations to hold programs and staff accountable. It was never the Navajo people’s intention to excuse the president from accountability.”

“This election happened in 2009 before President Begaye was even a delegate on the Navajo Nation Council and it wouldn’t surprise me if he didn’t vote,” added Delegate Tsosie. “If you read the history of the referendum movement it was about appropriations and it was not to excuse the executive branch from accountability.”

Council members continue to urge President Begaye to attend Thursday’s Naabik’iyáti’ Committee meeting to address the matter and to seek a reasonable compromise, despite President Begaye stating, “There is nothing to debate tomorrow” in Wednesday’s press release from the President’s Office.

In a letter to President Begaye on Dec. 7, Speaker LoRenzo Bates respectfully requested the president’s attendance at tomorrow’s meeting.

“As leaders of our respective branches of government I firmly believe that we can resolve this matter and move the government forward. This offer to meet with the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee is in the spirit of K’é and as leaders we can exhibit our commitment to the principle on One Nation, One Voice by talking this matter out,” wrote Speaker Bates.

The Council nor Speaker Bates received an official response to the letter from President Begaye.

“It’s very disappointing that President Begaye seems unwilling to sit down with Council members to work toward a compromise,” stated Delegate Shepherd. “Despite the lack of communication, we welcome President Begaye to the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee meeting to allow the opportunity for open dialogue with the intent of reaching a compromise.”

The Naabik’iyáti’ Committee is scheduled to meet on Thursday at 10:00 a.m. in the Council Chamber in Window Rock. To view the proposed agenda, please visit [navajonationcouncil.org](http://navajonationcouncil.org).

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