



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 30, 2015

MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Presidential override fails to garner enough support from Council

WINDOW ROCK – During a special session held on Wednesday, the Navajo Nation Council addressed several legislations including Legislation No. 0398-15, which sought to override the presidential veto of resolution CO-46-15. The override did not garner the required 16 supporting votes, with a vote of 10-12.

Council unanimously approved CO-46-15 in October, which sought to amend certain provisions within Title II of the Navajo Nation Code to make the legislative process more efficient. The resolution included an amendment stating that “the veto of a budget line-item shall only be to the numeric appropriated dollar amount.”

Following Wednesday’s vote, legislation sponsor Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), said there still remains a need to clarify the extent of the line-item veto authority.

“If it is to go back to the people to clarify, then who will take the lead in initiating the referendum process to do so?” asked Delegate Shepherd, noting that initiating a referendum would require a great deal of time and resources to gather signatures to place such a question on a ballot.

During his presentation to Council, Delegate Shepherd said the Office of the President continuously misinformed the public regarding the intent of the override legislation.

“There’s been a lot of misinformation and I want to emphasize that this legislation does not attempt to override the authority granted by the Navajo people,” said Delegate Shepherd. “We are not attempting to amend or take away the authority granted by the Navajo people.”

Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) said that without clarity on the matter, he anticipates that issues will continue to arise if President Russell Begaye continues to overstep the authority granted by the people.

“We will continue to stand on the facts of this and any matter and share those facts with the public,” stated Speaker Bates.

During the discussion, Delegate Shepherd said President Begaye’s use of the line-item veto authority in November to deny certain funding for the St. Michaels Association for Special Education program was a prime example of the president overstepping his authority by appropriating dollars – a legislative function.

The Council unanimously approved the legislation with no amendments, which appropriated approximately \$2.4 million in much needed funding to help the program provide services for special needs children.

Delegate Shepherd pointed out that despite the fact that the legislation went through the proper process outlined in the Appropriations Act in Title 12 of the Navajo Nation Code, President Begaye used the line-item authority to deny approximately \$1.8 million from the program.

“At that point he began legislating,” said Delegate Shepherd. “The president is inching toward abusing the line-item authority. This clarification is intended to ensure checks and balances and to ensure that the appropriation of funds goes through the proper process outline in Title 12.”

Delegate Shepherd also stated that when the referendum was presented to the public in 2009, the public was informed that dollar amounts or appropriations would be subject to the line-item veto authority, and that President Begaye continues to overstep the authority by overstriking legislative language such as Conditions of Appropriations, which are intended to hold programs and staff accountability to meeting the needs of the Navajo people.

Following the session, Speaker Bates said the Council will remain cognizant of President Begaye’s use of the line-item authority and called for the president to communicate with the Council on a regular basis.

“This situation could have been resolved weeks ago had President Begaye honored the Council’s invitations to meet and discuss this matter,” said Speaker Bates. “Moving forward, I recommend that President Begaye meet and communicate with the Council to address the many important issues at hand. His failure to do so thus far has brought us to this point.”

Delegate Shepherd said the Council has done its due diligence and will bring forth legislations in January to initiate public referendums that will allow public input on several matters.

###

For news on the latest legislative branch activities, please visit www.navajonationcouncil.org or find us on Facebook and Twitter, search for keywords: Navajo Nation Council