



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

President Begaye attempts to create “public panic” over the removal of the Controller

WINDOW ROCK – The Navajo Nation Council met in a special session on Wednesday, and voted 17-5 in support of Legislation No. 0417-16, removing Jim R. Parris as the Controller of the Navajo Nation. The Council serves as the final authority for the bill.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááhááí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) asked for Council’s support for the legislation and said he did not wish to discuss the details of the matter publicly because it is a personnel matter.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) began Wednesday’s discussion by expressing his disappointment with a press release issued by the Office of the President and Vice President on Wednesday entitled, *“In losing our Controller, the Nation stands to lose its financial stability,”* which included wrong and misleading statements in a politically driven attempt to sensationalize the role and duties of Jim R. Parris in his former role as the Controller.

The press release from OPVP stated that removing the Controller would be “financially catastrophic” for the Navajo Nation, which Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) said is completely false because the Navajo Nation has administrative processes, procedures, and safeguards in place to ensure the financial stability of the Navajo Nation.

“I am truly disappointed with the misinformation that was disseminated to the Navajo people by President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez. As former Council members, they should have the knowledge and understanding of the processes currently in place in the event that the position of the Controller becomes vacant,” said Speaker Bates.

Throughout the three hour discussion, numerous Council members said one of the main issues is the fact that Parris’ contract with President Begaye’s office only required him to work for the Navajo Nation three days per week while receiving a salary of approximately \$140,000 and thousands more in quarterly bonuses. Council members said the contract document was never shared with the Council.

“We have elderly people who are not receiving adequate services and have unmet needs and yet we are paying him a large salary for working part-time,” said Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown

(Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), who added that President Begaye's statements regarding a "financial catastrophe" were disturbing and said the president should instill hope and a positive outlook for the Navajo people instead of misleading them.

The Council also approved an amendment to include a "delegation of authority" memorandum issued by Parris in November that allows for an acting Controller to assume the duties and responsibilities until President Begaye appoints a replacement.

According to Navajo Nation Code, the Controller is appointed by the Navajo Nation President, confirmed by the Navajo Nation Council, and serves at the pleasure of the Council.

"The Nation has been without a Controller before and it did not interfere with payroll for Navajo Nation employees, general assistance, burial assistance, and veterans assistance," stated Speaker Bates. "To blatantly attempt to misinform the Navajo citizens and cause a 'public panic' regarding direct services is without a doubt a political ploy by the OPVP."

Speaker Bates said the role of the Controller is limited to overseeing the daily operations of the Nation's finances, however, his position has no bearing on financial contracts, bond financing, agreements, leases, or the Nation's bond rating.

The Navajo Nation Council's standing committees and the Nation's Investment Committee handle the majority of high-level financial matters, and if required, the President signs contracts and leases, added Speaker Bates.

"The burial assistance program ran out of funding and President Begaye had to transfer the resources to the program because the OPVP missed the contract renewal deadline that would have replenished those funds," said Speaker Bates. "Not to mention that the lack of veterans assistance has caused concern for Council because the OPVP has failed to appoint an executive director for the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration."

Recently, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received reports from Navajo veterans stating that they have not received their assistance checks, housing, and veterans burial assistance from the NNVA, which is currently under the control of OPVP.

Moments prior to voting on the legislation, Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch' izhi) stated that if the Navajo Nation's finances and investments are important to the Nation's leadership then a full-time Controller should be appointed as soon as possible.

The Navajo Nation Council voted 17-5 to approve Legislation No. 0417-16. The Council serves as the final authority for the bill and the removal of Parris as the Controller is effective immediately.

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