



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., pleased with reform agreement to restructure Navajo Nation government, reduce size of Council

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan agreed to work together to seek comprehensive reform of the Navajo government on Wednesday.

After six weeks of discussions, the two leaders signed a memorandum of agreement Wednesday that calls for the creation of a 12-member group to produce procedures that would lead to reform legislation that would include the reduction of the Council to 40 members.

The agreement also calls for legislation that would place a referendum question on the November election ballot to change how many Navajo voters would be needed to change the number of Council delegates. Specifically, the legislation would change Section 102(A) of Title 2 of the Navajo Nation Code. Instead of requiring a majority of all voters in all voting precincts to change the size of the Council, only 35 percent of the electorate would be needed.

“As Navajo people, it is always good to come together with *ke'* to talk about the challenges which come our way each day. Certainly government reform is a big challenge,” President Shirley said of his meetings with Speaker Morgan. “My prayer and hope is that, using *ke'*, we are setting a good example of working together to take on the challenges which befall us and our people daily.”

However, the President’s government reform petition drives to reduce the Council and give the President line item veto authority will continue until the Council passes legislation to implement the agreement’s terms.

The agreement also calls reform group to meet weekly to discuss the restructuring of the government.

The first round of meetings is scheduled to end Sept. 30.



Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan and President Joe Shirley, Jr., signed a memorandum of agreement on Aug. 13 to seek comprehensive government reform through legislation. The agreement calls for a special session of the Navajo Nation Council to adopt legislation to get the process started with the creation of a body to explore options and submit them by the end of September.

It is expected written procedures that set out the rules for a comprehensive restructuring of the government, a timetable for completion of that process, and identifying those to be involved and their roles will be produced by the group.

Next, the group will present its government reform document to the Council which will then refer the plan to the Navajo people to approve or disapprove the comprehensive restructuring during the Nov. 4 election.

The two leaders agreed that the Council's legislation will make no changes to the government restructuring document.

The agreement also calls for the Council to appropriate \$2 million at its next session in order for the reform group to complete its work.

"I hope that the agreement we have put in place will be acted upon in an affirmative manner and brought to fruition by the Navajo Nation Council," the President said. "There is a real dire need to address government reform at this time, and I'm glad that we have actually begun to do something about it."

The President said government reform should have been addressed within three years after the Title 2 amendments were put into place in 1990 but that it did not happen.

"Yes, there is very serious interest by the majority of our people in reducing the Navajo Nation Council to 24 members judging by the garnering of over 10,000 signatures thus far," he said. "The drive for signatures for the two initiatives will continue, and we have until Nov. 6,

2008, to get 16,800 signatures. Certainly, the two initiatives we had started and are continuing to work on – reducing the size of the Navajo Nation Council and the line-item-veto authority for the President – many of us feel and believe in is a good start toward government reform, albeit it's only two issues."

The President said the initiative petition drive will be halted when the Navajo Nation Council takes action on the proposed settlement agreement legislation.

He credited Speaker Morgan, as well as delegates Leonard Tsosie and Raymond Maxx "for stepping forward to suggest using *k'e* to see if we can come to a settlement agreement about how to proceed with government reform."

"All that is lacking now is for the whole of the Navajo Nation Council to acquiesce in the agreement," he said. "If and when they do, I believe we are well on our way to reforming our Navajo Nation government in a more comprehensive and wholesome way."

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