



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
OFFICE – 928-871-7917
CELL – 928-309-8532
pressoffice@opvp.org

Government Reform Task Force announces response to anti-reform website, sets record straight with factual, independently verifiable information

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Task Force on Government Reform and the Office of the President and Vice President this week issued a substantial response to inaccurate statements regarding two government reform initiatives posted on the anti-government reform website Keepthe88.com.

The response is in two versions. One is a newspaper insert published in the Dec. 10 edition of the Navajo Times and the Dec. 9 edition of the Gallup Independent.

The insert contains a message to Navajo citizens by Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., a chronology of events from April 29, 2008 to now, ballot and election information, charts of Legislative Branch spending, and a comparison between the Navajo Nation Council and the New Mexico Legislature.

The newspaper insert will also be home-delivered to thousands of homes across the Navajo Nation.

The second version is a more complete response to the anti-government reform website. It runs 37 pages in length and is available online at www.navajo.org and www.88to24.org.

The Task Force welcomes inquiries about how its responses are sourced and substantiated, and has provided dozens of Internet links so voters can check statements, history, court opinions, reports and other background for themselves.

The Keepthe88 website statements are unsigned and unattributed. Although labeled as “frequently asked questions,” they mention neither who asked them nor where they come from.

The Keepthe88 website statements make unsubstantiated assertions about what the two government reform initiatives will do and *will not* do. None cite any sources to validate claims or independently verify assertions. Almost all are opinions unsupported by fact.

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The December 15 special election will be the first time in Navajo history that voters have a direct and specific role in deciding the structure of their own government and the powers of the President. Until now, all decisions of this kind have been made by the Navajo Nation Council with voter input limited to lobbying or, at most, chapter resolutions – neither of which assure compliance.

The purpose and goal of reducing the Council to 24 delegates is to make the Council accountable to the people as possible, cut its high costs by millions of dollars a year, restore true checks and balances to the three-branch government as was intended in 1989, and return it to its policy-making function.

Reducing the Council is the People’s will. Navajos voted for it in 2000. They signed petitions in support of it. They are closely following news of it, and are eagerly waiting to vote for it on Dec. 15, 2009.

In the May 2, 2000, primary election referendum to decide the size of the Council, Navajos voted in favor of reducing the Council to 24 delegates. Voters were also given the option to choose among 32, 44, 48, 72, 88, and 110 delegates.

On Sept. 5, 2000, the Navajo people voted to reduce the Council to 24 delegates. But because of the way the referendum law is written, requiring a majority vote in every voting precinct, the Council was not reduced. That is why this effort is brought as an initiative from the people.

On May 14-15, 2002, the Government Development Commission sponsored a Statutory Reform Convention at Red Rock State Park attended by hundreds of Navajo representatives. The representatives forwarded 26 reform proposals to the Navajo Nation Council. The Council did not adopt any of the reform proposals.

With Council reduction, every delegate will represent more than one chapter. However, that is occurring now without objection from the public or Council. Today, three delegates represent four chapters, 24 delegates represent three chapters, and 30 delegates represent three chapters. Only 30 delegates represent one of the

110 chapters, and many chapters are already represented by delegates from other communities.

It remains a generally-held public opinion of the Navajo people that the Council governs only with the consent of the people.

“Under Fundamental Law, the Navajo People, as well as the Council, may make laws for the good of the community; the People’s authority to make laws is not delegated to them by the Council. The referendum and initiative processes are modern acknowledgment of this authority.”

Navajo Nation Supreme Court
Title 1 N.N.C. §§ 201; 206 (2005)
[SC-CV-41-08](#), July 18, 2008

In the book, *The Navajo Political Experience*, Professor David Wilkins wrote that surveys of the Navajo people by the Navajo Government Development Commission revealed “a general distrust of tribal officials and a desire for a more representative National Council.” He wrote that the Navajo public “also insisted that the people should be the ultimate judge of what changes tribal government should entail.”

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