



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., delivers initiative petitions to Navajo Election Administration, next step is certification

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., today delivered to the Navajo Election Administration six file boxes filled with hundreds of initiative petitions containing the signatures of thousands of Navajo voters who want to see the Navajo Nation Council reduced to 24 delegates and the President empowered with budgetary line item veto authority to help reduce unnecessary spending.

Even with the slowdown of signature gathering during six weeks of “talking things out” between President Shirley and Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan in June and July, and the nine weeks afterward while the Navajo Nation waited in vain for the Speaker to act on the agreement he signed with the President, some 18,889 Navajos signed petitions to seek an election to reduce the council, and 17,937 signed to give the President line item veto authority.

A minimum of 16,530 certified signatures of eligible registered Navajo voters is required for each petition to be valid.

“I think government reform is very much needed,” President Shirley told the Gallup Independent while each page of the petitions was stamped by Navajo Election Administration officials. “The government should work

more efficiently, the legislature should work more efficiently.”



Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., watches as Navajo Election Administration staff logs in government reform petitions from petition circulators on Tuesday. Some 18,889 Navajos signed petitions to seek an election to reduce the Navajo Nation Council from 88 to 24 delegates, and 17,937 signed to give the President line item veto authority.

The number of signatures obtained makes these two initiatives and petition signature-gathering drive the largest ever conducted on the Navajo Nation, said OPVP Chief of Staff Patrick Sandoval.

Also today, Office of Hearings and Appeals Hearing Officer John Chapela issued an order to dismiss Speaker Morgan’s May 19 objection to the President’s petition drive, finding that the objection failed to join an indispensable party – the Navajo Election Administration.

The President argued that the Speaker's objection was untimely and premature because it had been made before the petitions had been submitted or determined sufficient by the Election Administration.

"The Election Administration is clearly an indispensable party to this action and should have been given immediate notice of the objections made by Speaker Morgan," Hearing Officer Chapela wrote. "This matter must therefore be dismissed for failure to join an indispensable party, the Navajo Election Administration."

The President told the Independent that the initiatives were a good beginning for government reform while acknowledging that much will need to be done to make the Navajo Nation government better.

He said most Navajo chapters still need local governance certification – only nine have completed the process – for the Navajo Nation to become a fully viable government as past leaders envisioned to work with state, federal and foreign governments.

But he dismissed the Speaker's proposal to eliminate the Executive Branch, abolish the Office of the President and Vice President, and to increase the size of the council to 100 members as impractical, a backward step, and unacceptable to the Navajo people.

"I don't think the people will go with it," the President said. "The government was reformed already back in 1990. We had what he's now referring to where we didn't have the president. We called him the chairman of the Navajo Nation Council."

The President said the Nation saw problems resulting from the chairmanship and the transition from that.

"In the processes, people died," he said "People got hurt irreparably. But we changed the government anyway to a three-branch government. I feel that the government is working for the most part. Certainly, we still need to work on it to make some changes to it to make it better.

"But I think to do away with the presidency, which is the only voice of the people, which is the only voice for the

whole Nation, to do away with that would be a travesty, and I don't think the people will have it."

The President said government reform is needed because the people seek services today that they've sought for 10, 20 or 30 years. They ask for water lines, power lines, and are still waiting, he said. Despite a lot of revenue going into the general fund annually, a small portion is ever set aside for needed infrastructure, he said.

"This year we set aside \$22 million for infrastructure, which is the first time for capital improvement," he said. "That's good but we should be putting aside at least \$50 million a year for capital improvement – housing, power lines, water lines, waste water disposal systems."

Asked to respond to the Speaker's office assertion that the President does not have a plan for government reform, he said, "This is the plan. They've heard me talk about it from day one that we're going to do government reform, the legislature working with the president. We can talk about downsizing government, building up chapter governments and getting more money for infrastructure for the support of the people out there. Putting the people first, that's the plan."

Asked about the role of the President, he said it was to speak for the Navajo people, mind the affairs of the Nation, and make sure that the Nation's money is used prudently, "which is what the line item veto is all about."

"This is the only position, along with the Vice President, that gets elected by popular vote, everybody," President Shirley said. "The world out there knows it. The U.S government knows it. State governments know it, and they have their respect for the government."

"What I do hear is, 'What does the Navajo Nation president say? What is the position of the Navajo Nation president?', knowing and believing that this is the person put there by all of the people, by the electorate."

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