



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Speaker Morgan: Does Shirley's initiative petition to reduce Council really fix the problems of government?

Real government reform must include both the executive branch as well as the legislative branch

"Some might call it a constitution, others might call it a charter, but we need something that completely re-examines how this government works and fixes the problems we have encountered since 1989. The big issue now is how to get this done?" — Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Does Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr.'s initiative petition to reduce the size of the Navajo Nation Council to 24 delegates really fix the problems of how the Navajo Nation government operates?

This is the question that has been on the mind of the Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan since the initiative petition was made public last month.

"There are a lot of problems with both the legislative and executive branches of the government," Speaker Morgan said. "The president's task force points at the council delegates' rings as an example of the failure of legislative oversight. That's a fair question, but it's an equally fair question to ask how failures of executive branch oversight led to things like the Bio Chemical Decontamination Systems (BCDS) disaster, which cost the Nation far more than those rings."

"But, what worries me most," Morgan added, "is that no one is asking the question of how changing the number of people who sit in the council chambers can really fix any of the serious problems in either branch."

"Simply changing the size of the Navajo Nation Council only makes for fewer council delegates exercising exactly the same authority as the current 88-member Navajo Nation Council," Morgan explained.

He emphasized that changing the size of the Council will do nothing to address the government reform issues President Shirley is broadcasting in support of the initiative petition to reduce the Council to 24 delegates.

Speaker Morgan said, "Concerns about the efficiency of Navajo Nation government operations are much broader than the size of the Navajo Nation Council."

"Real government reform must include both the executive branch as well as the legislative branch of the Navajo Nation government," Morgan added.

Speaker Morgan expressed that he is willing to sit down with President Shirley to talk about the needs of the Navajo people and the role and function of Navajo Nation government.

"If President Shirley is truly concerned with improving the way the Navajo Nation government operates, then I encourage the President to re-evaluate his initiative drive," Speaker Morgan said. "Because — in reality — reducing the size of the Council does very little to address how the Navajo Nation government functions."

"Let's have a meaningful dialogue about how the Navajo Nation government can and should reform for the best interest of our People," Morgan added. "As elected Naat'áanii (tribal leaders), President Shirley and I owe our constituents the courtesy of having thought things through, talked things out — to make plans for our collective future and to address meaningful and enduring government."

"In the end, reducing the size of the Council may be a factor in a government reform process," Morgan explained. "But, we should not deceive ourselves and think reduction of the Council will solve all the problems of how the Navajo Nation government operates or provides government services to the Navajo people."

Speaker Morgan also touched on a solution that may provide the kind of real reform needed by the Navajo Nation government.



"In 1989, the Council said that the current form of government was only temporary — a stopping place on the way to a government that would truly reflect the will of the Navajo people. That never happened, and maybe now it's time to start that process again," Morgan said. "The President and I should be looking at a permanent, meaningful solution to the problems of the Nation's government."

"Some might call it a constitution, others might call it a charter, but we need something that completely re-examines how this government works and fixes the problems we have encountered since 1989," Speaker Morgan explained. "The big issue now is how to get this done."

Morgan added that "the President's Task Force has gotten us moving and I commend President Shirley for that. But he needs to be ready to do more now than just push to reduce the number of council delegates."

Last Friday, Speaker Morgan met with President Shirley and discussed the idea of a broader reform. Morgan pushed for a second meeting on June 9 to develop more specific plans for such a reform effort.

Speaker Morgan said, "I am sorry to say that his response has been somewhat puzzling. He told me that he could make no commitments until he spoke to his "people." I haven't heard from him since then, but I am still hopeful that he will meet with me in the near future — with an open mind — to discuss real reform, rather than only reducing the number of Council delegates."

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