



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

Contact: Joshua Lavar Butler, Communications Director

Phone: (928) 871-7160

Cell: (928) 255-2946

Fax: (928) 871-7255

joshualavarbutler@navajo.org

joshualavarbutler@yahoo.com

www.navajonationcouncil.org

March 4, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Shirley's veto impacts direct services to Navajo people

"The president was given this legislation 10 days ago. It was an emergency. He should have addressed it immediately—not 10 days later." – Young Jeff Tom

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – A large majority of the 21st Navajo Nation Council are displeased by Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr.'s veto of Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CF-06-08, which was Legislation No. 0691-07.

The amount which was overwhelmingly approved and requested by the Council was for \$17 million to help with the nation's recent emergencies and vital programs and projects at the chapter level.

The majority of the council voted 60-10 on Feb. 26, to amend the Navajo Nation fiscal year 2008 budget by approving supplemental appropriations in the amount of \$17,015,000 from the Grant Reserve Fund balance.

The money was equally divided to all 110 Navajo chapters to improve the standard of living and quality of life for many Navajo people.

The response to this veto was immediate as the Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale) said help is needed now.

"The emergency needs of the Navajo people must be addressed immediately," Speaker Morgan said. "The people need assistance in the outlying areas. Direct services are very important to the Navajo Nation Council. We need to respond now as tribal government leaders."

The appropriation was sponsored by Council Delegate Young Jeff Tom (Mariano Lake/Smith Lake), who was disappointed by the president's veto since he thought there was an understanding in place already.

"Before the legislation came before the council, I met with President Shirley and his staff," Tom explained.

Tom said he explained to President Shirley why the council was going to vote on the added monies and Shirley "ignored" the reasoning behind the council's request.

"I told him about the needs and how help was needed immediately," Tom said. "During our work session we discussed and agreed that a reservation-wide need regarding improvements was needed at each chapter level - that was understood."

As part of the emergency legislation, the Department of Emergency Management was appropriated \$1 million for emergency services due to the extreme snow and mud conditions within the Navajo Nation.

That was funding that was needed "long ago" said one chapter official.

"We have about 20 elders who need emergency services now," a Hardrock Senior

Center official said, "and with the rains and mud, we haven't been able to get meals, wood, and other needed supplies to them (elderly). The chapters in the remotes areas have been greatly impacted so this news is very disappointing to us all."

The official also mentioned that due to the lack of funding, numerous homes in the region are not inhabitable.

Many elders are not getting their meals in the hour and half allotted time, which is in accordance with the Arizona state food regulations.

The Chapters were supposed to receive \$3 million for home improvements.

The Hardrock Chapter official also stated they were disappointed in the fact that their chapter buildings and senior center has "major plumbing and electrical problems."

The senior center gets repeated safety citations for having faulty wiring and unsafe conditions for the seniors. The plumbing doesn't work at times either.

It would cost more than \$600 for a plumber to drive out to the senior center and that is just for the service call and not the hourly rate the plumber would charge on work that needed to be done.

The veto also impacted Navajo college students, which was suppose to receive \$3 million for the Navajo Nation Chapter Scholarship program.

H. Lee Begay, of Red Valley, Ariz., who is currently a graduate student at Northern Arizona University, said education funding should be a priority.

"There should be money made available as there are a lot of students — bright Navajo students — who need assistance, but the money is not there," she added, "I would think President Shirley would want to give more money to college students."

In Durango, Colo., Kevin Benally, who is an undergraduate student at Fort Lewis College, said this veto says to him "...that despite money being earmarked for college students and reservation enrichment by our tribal leader, Navajo college students won't see any of it (funding)."

Benally, who hails from Kayenta/Monument Valley, Ariz., said the veto is proof to him that Navajo funding is "not being wisely spent."

And despite Shirley's statement in Tuesday's press release stating: "It is my understanding that because of the automatic carryover, many chapters have acquired substantial reserves," that is not the case.

Amos Johnson (Forest Lake) told the council a few weeks ago, that it is "very important that they support this legislation, so that young Navajo people can get educated, return back to the nation and help their communities.

Johnson also mentioned that many chapters have exhausted all their scholarship funds and the council must take the initiative to help them.

Additional funding was allocated for Navajo Nation Chapter Veterans and the Office of the Speaker to utilize for discretionary funds for direct services for Navajo people.

Tom explained that "Navajo chapters are already anticipating these tribal revenues and what is the council supposed to tell them?"

"Our Navajo people need assistance out there and this veto is preventing them from receiving the benefits of these direct services," Tom explained. "Our veterans, our elderly, our children—our people—are the ones that will lose. The president was given this legislation 10 days ago. It was an emergency. He should have addressed it immediately—not 10 days later."

The Office of the Speaker continues to receive numerous requests for assistance, despite the veto by President Shirley.