



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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May 29, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Speaker Morgan not pleased with President Shirley's continued attacks of the Council

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— Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan is not pleased with the continued attacks of Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr.'s criticism of the 21st Navajo Nation Council while advocating for its reduction.

"President Shirley continues to publicly criticize the Council, which is dividing the Navajo Nation," Speaker Morgan said. "The Legislative Branch of the Navajo Nation continues to provide needed government services to the Navajo Nation, despite the criticism from the President."

A recent news article in the Gallup Independent, dated Wednesday, May 28, President Shirley is quoted as saying that, "the Navajo people need to take their government back from unresponsive, overspending delegates."

"The President fails to see the unresponsive and overspending that is occurring right in his own house," Speaker Morgan added. "If the President is so concerned about curbing tribal spending, he should very well begin with cleaning his own house first."

President Shirley says that the "people need to know how their money is being spent; they need to have a voice."

The President is correct in that the Navajo people do have the right to know how their tribal dollars are being spent, and the President should reveal how his administration is spending the Navajo people's money as well.

Speaker Morgan asserts his position along with numerous other council delegates that the reduction of the Council will hinder its ability to provide services to the Navajo people.

Currently, the Navajo people elect 88 Council Delegates from 110 chapters. If the President's initiative were passed, then the number of delegates for even the largest chapters would be decreased. The chapters of Crownpoint, Shiprock, Fort Defiance, Chinle, and Toh Nanees Dizi (Tuba City) would likely receive only one delegate per chapter, as opposed to the number they elect under the 88 delegate Navajo Nation Council.

However, it is the smaller chapters who would be most severely harmed, as they would be forced to share an election precinct with chapters having much larger voting populations or a much greater number of smaller chapters.

Even if the larger chapters received only one delegate each, this would reduce the number of delegates available for election through the other 105 chapters to only 19.

In his other criticism, the President accuses the Council for continuously wasting tribal funds, but the Navajo people should question if President Shirley is criticizing his own Navajo people for receiving the desperately-needed funds that they need at the local chapter level — funds that he should be advocating for.

The Navajo people should be made aware of a presidential executive order that discourages division directors and executive branch staff from lobbying the Council for program funding.

"This is indicative that the President is not willing to work with his own divisions in advocating for much-needed funds for their programs," Speaker Morgan said. "If the President is not helping the divisions to seek funds, how are the programs supposed to function efficiently?"

In the news article, Shirley is also quoted as saying that the Council finds a way to spend money on itself and he referred to the approximate \$300,000 that the Council allegedly spent for its annual motorcycle ride to Washington recently.

Although the Council did appropriate \$300,000 for veterans' issues, the Office of the Speaker is reporting that only four of the five council Delegates that did go to Washington used the Navajo Nation Council's travel account, which is calculated at \$17,130.75 and not the \$300,000 that President Shirley is criticizing the Council for.

It is a fact that \$300,000 was earmarked for Navajo Veterans activities, but it was not all used. The Department of Veterans Administration — which is under President Shirley's executive branch — received \$60,000. The Veterans

Department made the selection of who would travel to Washington. A representative from each agency was selected and they made arrangements using the Office of the Speaker's account — where the \$300,000 was budgeted.

Laura Calvin, Financial Advisor for the Speaker's Office, said that \$20,000 of the \$300,000 was also disbursed to the Black Creek Gourd Society, the group that hosted the gourd dancing event at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington on May 24. Many Navajo veterans were directly involved with the planning of this event.

In addition, Speaker Morgan also approved several travel requests from Navajo veterans that wanted to travel to Washington to advocate for veterans' issues.

The funds are accounted for and for President Shirley to say that the Speaker's Office spent \$300,000 on bike rides is erroneous.

The Navajo people should question if President Shirley is criticizing the Navajo veterans for spending tribal dollars. There is a lot of advocacy that needs to be done on behalf of veterans' issues and the Speaker's Office and the Council has responded.

President Shirley also said that "funds could be put to better use by providing scholarships or housing assistance. The Council wishes to remind the President that they have continuously overrode his vetoes to deliver funds to the Navajo people for such things.

President Shirley makes reference to the Navajo Council's 12 standing committees having numerous subcommittees within subcommittees. The Council does not have such subcommittees within subcommittees as the President assumes. It shows that anything will be said to continuously attack the Council, even going so far as to fabricate allegations of the Council.

"There are no subcommittees within subcommittees," Speaker Morgan said. "Certainly, we do have subcommittees with specific tasks and they are accounted for at all times per Navajo Nation code."

Speaker Morgan also questioned, "How can the President push for reforming the government if he's not astute of our governmental operations, the organization of the subcommittees to be exact?"

"The Council has been doing the President's job by appropriating funds to the Navajo people," Speaker Morgan added. "It's unfortunate that this is how he thanks us for doing his job. Regardless, the Council will continue to help the Navajo people — we have a job to do."