



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

President Shirley's initiatives causing confusion, disharmony and divisions

"President Shirley is only hurting the Navajo people by creating disharmony and causing divisions within our tribal government." — Evelyn Acothley (Bodaway-Gap/Cameron/Coppermine)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr.'s plan to reduce the Navajo Nation Council from 88 members to 24 members is not government reform, but is an attempt to cause disharmony and division within the Navajo Nation government through negative media attention.

The Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan considers President Shirley's initiative as retaliation against a Council that has repeatedly overridden his vetoes, in order to deliver much-needed services and funds to the Navajo people.

Speaker Morgan, speaking on behalf of the Navajo Council, is concerned about the President's initiatives and he has questioned why it took so long for President Shirley to finally begin working on his platform after nearly six years in office.

"The reduction in the Council will not benefit the Navajo people," Speaker Morgan said. "If anything, the Navajo people will lose their voice in the tribal government under the proposed initiative by the President. This is not a democratic form of government — nor does it represent reform. Our Navajo people will always desire representation."

Speaker Morgan is waiting for plans from President Shirley to recreate the Executive and Judicial Branches of the Navajo government as well.

In 1989, the three branches of government was established by the Nation to create a balance of power in response to a system of government that wielded a substantial amount of political power to one person — the Chairman. Political power was monopolized under this former governmental structure of the Chairmanship.

What emerged from the 1989 government reform was three branches of government — the legislative, executive and the judicial branches — with the Speaker of the Council, the President of the Navajo Nation and the Chief Justice emerging as the three branch chiefs and as tribal leaders with the idea of creating a balance of power.

It is worth noting that President Shirley was against the Chairman's attempt to monopolize power in 1989 and was one member that voted in favor of creating the three branch government to create a balance of power.

Speaker Morgan said that President Shirley is threatening to topple this balance that was created to undo a governmental structure that he sees as working against his office — against a system that prevents the President from having a substantial amount of power.

"The President's initiative will cause confusion for our Navajo people," Speaker Morgan explained. "The Navajo people will suffer from this misguided attempt at reform."

"A reduction in the number of council delegates will only hinder and discourage the involvement of the Navajo people," Speaker Morgan added. "The President's plan will not improve government efficiency and effectiveness and it will not create a balance of power."

A balance of power already exists within our Nation's government and the Executive Branch refuses to work within the system that is already available.

President Shirley also criticizes the Council for micro-managing divisions under the Executive Branch, but people need to understand that standing committees are in existence to provide oversight to the divisions that deliver services to the Navajo people. This established system is very similar to the federal system of congressional oversight committees.

The Navajo Nation government would be considered a dictatorship if governed under the President alone, without oversight provided by the standing committees of the Navajo Nation Council.

Evelyn Acothley (Bodaway-Gap/Cameron/Coppermine) expressed her displeasure with President Shirley's initiative as well and said, "There needs to be collaboration between the three branch chiefs. That is not a priority for the President."

Acothley added that President Shirley's criticism of the Council standing committees is unfounded. "President Shirley is only hurting the Navajo people by creating disharmony and causing divisions within our tribal government."

"We should be promoting accountability — that's what the Navajo people desire," Acothley said. "As oversight committees, we all have a role to insure that certain tasks are carried out for the delivery of direct services to our Navajo people."

Acothley said that her committee, the Health & Social Services Committee, has invited the President to several oversight committee meetings, but he does not attend them.

Acothley said that his input is welcomed, but he never shows up. She explained that it is important that the Navajo Nation branches prioritize and strategize together and the President's recent actions do not help the situation.

The Navajo Nation Council is operating within the confines of its purpose of providing the policy-making functions for which it is responsible. Any costs associated with the Council's operation are needed to run an efficient form of government.

President Shirley and his staff are concerned about saving tribal dollars, but the Navajo people should also question frivolous spending within the Executive Branch as well. It only makes sense to clean your own house first, before attempting to clean others.

Speaker Morgan reaffirmed his statement that President Shirley's plans defeat the true intent of the Navajo Nation government and that the President's plan is limiting the Navajo people from deciding who they want to elect as their representatives.

"The President is attempting to make changes to a single branch of government — the Legislative Branch," Speaker Morgan said. "That's not government reform, I would consider it government deform."

President Shirley is also proposing powers of the line item veto, but the Navajo people should understand that this is indicative that the President's Office is unable to work with the Navajo Nation Council.

President Shirley has not produced or presented a feasibility study or an estimate of the impacts from his initiatives. The Council is also awaiting his plans to reform the Executive and Judicial Branches of the Navajo Nation as well.

President Shirley also criticizes the Council for routinely waiving Navajo Nation laws to make appropriations, but the Navajo people need to understand that these appropriations are given to the Navajo people for direct services.

The Council continues to fund projects and appropriate money for direct services, senior services, veterans' services, scholarships and supplemental appropriations for the benefit of the Navajo people. This is due to the fact that the Executive Branch is not doing its job and the Council has consistently stepped in to address these matters.

"Why does the Council continue bailing the President out?" Council Delegate Young Jeff Tom questioned. "We are doing his work, but he continues to criticize us."

The waiving of laws is necessary by the Council and President Shirley has also benefited from the waiving of these laws through supplemental appropriations to his office, approval of casinos, approval of the Desert Rock Energy Project and through his attempt to approve a loan through JP Morgan Chase Bank.

Rex Lee Jim (Rock Point) explained that his chapter will be affected by the President's initiative to reduce the Council. He explained that as it is, smaller chapters are struggling to gain

representation in the Council and the reduction in the Council will only make matters worse.

Jim said that Council Delegates will tend to cater to larger chapters in their districts, such as Toh Nanees Dizi (Tuba City), Shiprock and Chinle — those chapters will have more representation. Council Delegates will be put into a position to cater to the larger chapters to garner more votes during election time and the smaller chapters will be left out.

“The smaller chapters will lose their representation,” Jim said.

Overall, President Shirley's plan to reestablish tribal government is being done unilaterally and his targeting of the Legislative Branch is not conducive to government reform.

“As the governing body of the Navajo Nation, we will stand by our authority,” Speaker Morgan said. “The Navajo people elected us as their direct representatives and we will continue to do our jobs as tribal legislators. Our government should not be converted to a dictatorship.”

“The President has chosen not to work with the Navajo Nation Council,” Speaker Morgan added. “Until he is ready to roll up his sleeves and stay home in Window Rock to work, I am sure our Navajo Nation Council will be willing to work in unity for reform on behalf of the Navajo people.”

“If there are problems in our Nation's government, why is only one branch of the government complaining?” Speaker Morgan said. “The Legislative and Judicial Branches are running efficiently.”

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