



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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President Begaye line item vetoes funds for senior citizens, chapters, grazing officials, and the Legislative and Judicial Branches in FY2017 budget

WINDOW ROCK – On Tuesday, President Russell Begaye used the presidential line item veto authority to deny funding for several critical programs in the Fiscal Year 2017 Comprehensive Budget, which was approved by the Navajo Nation Council on Sept. 8 during the annual budget session. The current fiscal year will end on Sept. 30.

President Begaye issued a memorandum to Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) outlining a total of 17 line-item vetoes that includes the denial of \$1.4 million for the Navajo Area Agency on Aging program that would have restored working hours for their employees to 80-hours per pay period and would have provided more direct services to Navajo senior citizens.

In August, NAAA employees came before the Council's Naabik'iyáti' Committee and made an emotional plea for additional funding to help senior citizen centers provide services such as meals for elderly Navajo people. The employees said that due to lack of funding, their work hours were reduced which limited the services provided to senior citizens.

"President Begaye has continuously campaigned on the notion that he supports Navajo elders, however, his action to veto funding for senior citizens does not reflect his words," stated Speaker Bates. "As a result of the president's line-item veto, our senior centers will continue to have funding shortfalls and it will continue to impact services for our elderly people."

President Begaye also used the line item veto authority to overstrike funding in the amount of \$1 million that Council approved for each of the 110 chapters that was intended to help with funding shortfalls to provide services at the local level.

Approximately \$847,000 for grazing officials was also line item vetoed by the president, which was approved by the Council to assist in compensating grazing officials due to insufficient funding in previous years.

"Each year, the budget does not provide enough funding for grazing officials and the Council recognized that need and approved additional funding, but once again President Begaye was not supportive of the grazing officials," Speaker Bates stated.

On several occasions, Council members including the Law and Order Committee have met with Acting Chief Justice Allen Sloan to discuss critical needs for the Judicial Branch, which has been understaffed and resulted in long working hours for employees in order to keep up with the workloads and duties.

“There is no doubt that the Judicial Branch is in great need of additional funds to provide efficient services for our communities and the Law and Order Committee recognized that and pushed for Council’s approval of an additional \$752,000 in their budget,” stated Speaker Bates, in reference to President Begaye’s denial of the funding for the Judicial Branch.

Speaker Bates also expressed disappointment with President Begaye’s line item veto of all funding for 24 Legislative District Assistant positions under the Legislative Branch.

“The Legislative District Assistants play a vital role in our communities by working with chapters and serving as a bridge to the central government, however, President Begaye does not recognize the importance of their roles,” added Speaker Bates. “Many of the Legislative District Assistants are young professionals who have moved home to the Navajo Nation to help their people and their communities and many are well-educated and provide valuable services to our communities, so it is very disappointing that President Begaye is not supportive.”

Speaker Bates also noted that the budget for the Office of the President and Vice President has more than doubled since President Begaye took office in May of 2015.

“When you compare the funding that previous presidents have received, the current administration is receiving more that double the funding, meanwhile President Begaye has taken advantage of his authority to cut funding for our senior citizens, the youth, and many others,” added Speaker Bates.

Despite Tuesday’s actions by the president, Speaker Bates said the Navajo Nation Council will continue to advocate and support senior citizens, the youth, and veterans.

“The 23rd Navajo Nation Council will continue to look for ways to ensure that these critical programs are funded and that we meet the needs of our people,” Speaker Bates said.

On Wednesday, Speaker Bates and Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) issued statements expressing their disappointment with the line item vetoes, which will air on local radio stations beginning on Thursday.

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