



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Delegates Kee Allen Begay, Jr. and Olin Kieyoomia to seek override of presidential veto of veterans bill

WINDOW ROCK – Council Delegates Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) and Olin Kieyoomia (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’a’a’) are assuring Navajo veterans that they will seek an override of President Russell Begaye’s veto of Navajo Nation Council Resolution CO-70-18, which sought to change the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council to a Veterans Board of Commissioners to give Navajo veterans greater decision-making authority over veterans issues. President Begaye issued the veto on Friday.

Delegate Begay sponsored legislation to establish the board of commissioners and grant them greater authority to properly execute the needs of Navajo veterans. Delegate Begay said President Begaye’s veto denies Navajo veterans a stronger role in presiding over formal recommendations to the Office of the President and Vice President on issues relating to funding, housing, the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, policies, regulations, and any other matters.

“President Begaye’s veto is a clear indication of his lack of support for Navajo veterans and his unwillingness to sit down and discuss the issues,” said Delegate Begay. “Instead of relinquishing some of his presidential authorities and empower our veterans, the president has decided to continue to maintain the status quo and harness that authority for himself.”

The president’s veto memorandum dated Nov. 2 referenced a resolution from the Eastern Navajo Agency Veterans Organization passed in July, which opposed the legislation sponsored by Delegate Begay.

In response, Delegate Begay stated that he attended the most recent Eastern Navajo Agency Veterans Organization meeting to discuss his legislation, however, the meeting adjourned before he had the opportunity to present to the veterans. He added that he respects the position of the the Eastern Navajo Agency Veterans Organization and that the organization had representatives present when he discussed the legislation with the Veterans Advisory Council and were afforded the opportunity to address their concerns and opposition at that time.

In the months leading up to the Council’s consideration of the bill, Delegate Begay traveled to meet with several veteran groups and successfully obtained supporting resolutions from the

Veterans Advisory Council, Fort Defiance Agency Veterans Organization, Northern Agency Veterans Organization, and Central Agency Veterans Organization.

Delegate Kieyoomia, who served as the Commander for the Fort Defiance Agency Veterans Organization when the group passed its supporting resolution, also shared his disappointment with President Begaye's veto action.

"It's unfortunate the president of the Navajo Nation continues to deny support for the Navajo veterans' initiatives to self-govern and to have a voice. President Begay has vetoed the Navajo Veterans Advisory Council's budget and funding for additional critical Veterans Administration staff positions," stated Delegate Kieyoomia.

In the veto memorandum, President Begaye also stated that he believes there should be input sought from all five Navajo agencies in regards to the legislation through public forums.

Delegate Kieyoomia questioned how the Navajo Veterans Administration is supposed to conduct public forums when President Begaye is not willing to fund the technical support needed to do so.

"Overall, Navajo veterans are in need of reform that encompasses accountability and transparency with the Navajo Veterans Administration and the Executive Branch – this was the intent in the creation of the Navajo Veterans Advisory Council, but due to the lack of consultation, advisement, and an open door policy on the part of the president, Navajo veterans still have no voice," added Delegate Kieyoomia.

Delegate Begay and Delegate Kieyoomia said they want to reassure Navajo veterans that they will introduce a legislation to override the veto of President Russell Begaye, and hope to see their Council colleagues vote in support of the override. In October, the Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved the legislation by a vote of 19-0.

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