

## RUSSELL BEGAYE PRESIDENT JONATHAN NEZ VICE PRESIDENT

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## PRESIDENT BEGAYE AND VICE PRESIDENT NEZ HONOR THE VOICES OF THE NAVAJO PEOPLE

WINDOW ROCK- President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez were in prompt attendance at 10 a.m. for today's special session of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council that addressed legislation in which Council was attempting to override and amend the presidential line-item veto authority.

President Begaye and Vice President Nez waited nearly an hour for the meeting to be called to order but had to leave soon after to attend to previously arranged obligations.

In an unusual turn of events, Speaker of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council, Lorenzo Bates excused himself from his role as Speaker to actively vote in favor of the legislation. In his absence he delegated Honorable Jonathan Hale as Speaker pro tem.

Yet the legislation failed with a vote of 10 yea, 12 nay and 2 not voting.

"We want to express our deepest appreciation to the people of the Navajo Nation who today defended their right to speak, be heard and not be overwritten by their elected officials," said President Begave.

The Office of the President and Vice President (OPVP) would like to extend their appreciation to the twelve delegates that stepped forward and stood with the people by voting against the legislation. By doing so, these delegates have reaffirmed their support of the people who elected them into office.

"Today, twelve delegates acknowledged that the voice of the people supersedes anything that any elected official does. This includes council delegates themselves," said Vice President Nez. "We express a deep appreciation for those delegates that supported the people's voice."

As OPVP moves forward, the Office will continue to support the efforts of the Navajo people in moving the nation forward.

"Again, today the people won," said President Begaye. "They stood strong, they united and continued to demand that their voices be heard by their delegates. It is from the Navajo people that we should always generate any type of decision that we make."

In his introductory remarks, legislation sponsor Alton Joe Shepherd called into question President Begaye's usage of the line-item veto authority in legislation requesting funding for St. Michael's Special Education Schools.

"When the St. Michaels group brought the proposal over, we went through it with them. I told them that the Navajo Nation does not normally fund non-profit organizations because they, as non-profits, have access to multitudes of funding sources that the Navajo Nation government entities do not," said President Begaye.

President Begaye and Vice President Nez told them specifically that they would approve certain items they felt were pertinent to the continued operation of the school. They also told them specifically which items they would disapprove of.

"I reassured them that I would not sign off on every item that was in the proposal. That was the understanding we developed before they left."

Therefore, when line item veto transpired, St Michael's administration was well informed.

"In fact, I approved more items than I originally said I would. So I gave them several hundred thousands of dollars more then I said."

Delegate Shepherd also said that despite council's request to meet about the line-item veto override legislation, no meetings ever transpired.

Vice President Nez said he indeed had met with Speaker Bates and Delegate Shepherd to specifically address the line item veto override and discuss any possible compromises.

"We had met to specifically discuss the line-item veto. When they asked, 'What's the compromise?', I asked them what they wanted. There was no response," said Vice President Nez. "I said I guess there is nothing to talk about then. Also, we gave them a compromise in the letter we sent to the Naabik'iyati (NABI) committee meeting."

The letter dated Dec.17 was delivered to NABI by OPVP ambassador Peterson Zah. It responded to Speaker Bates' Dec. 7 letter asking to find a resolution or compromise in moving the amendments to the Title Two legislation.

The letter clearly states, "I agree to sign into law the Title Two amendment's legislation as originally recommended and submitted by the Title Two Subcommittee."

On a positive note, President Begaye said, "Vice President and I had the opportunity to go back to our former place of service, the historic Navajo Nation Council Chambers. We had an opportunity to talk with a number of delegates and have very cordial exchanges on various issues."

"We want to thank the public for protecting their voice on the authority given to the Navajo Nation president to override irresponsible spending of Navajo Nation monies," President Begaye said. "We also appreciate the delegates that stood behind the voice of the people."

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