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Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren cleared of Vice President's sexual harassment claim

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren has been cleared of Vice President Richelle Montoya's sexual harassment claim, according to the Navajo Nation Department of Justice.

In addition, "further investigation into Vice President Montoya's sexual harassment claim and the appointment of a Special Prosecutor are not warranted."

"Now that I have been cleared, we need to move forward as a Nation and a people," President Nygren said today. "This false allegation against me as President of the Navajo Nation has divided and hurt the entire Navajo Nation. We need to heal from this and focus on moving forward."

A preliminary investigation was launched by DOJ on April 19, 2024, after Vice President Montoya went accused President Nygren on social media of sexually harassing her during an August 2023 meeting.

On Dec. 16, Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch released preliminary findings of investigator Eric Dahlstrom of the firm Rothstein Donatelli.

Mr. Dahlstrom reported "Vice President Montoya's recounting of the August 17, 2023, incident does not constitute sexual harassment under policies applicable to either Navajo Nation elected officials or employees covered by the Navajo Nation [Personnel Policies Manual]. Further, the facts reported would not constitute a violation of any criminal law of the Navajo Nation."

"Vice President Montoya's recounting of the August 17, 2023, incident does not constitute sexual harassment under policies applicable to either elected officials or employees."

– Eric Dahlstrom, investigator of Vice President Richelle Montoya's allegations of sexual harassment

President Nygren said he welcomed and supported an open, independent, fair and transparent investigation, and one that the Navajo people could have full confidence in.

On April 19, the Attorney General announced her selection of Mr. Dahlstrom to immediately commence a thorough and comprehensive preliminary investigation "regarding complaints of impropriety in high level governmental offices pursuant to my authority under the Special Prosecutor Statute."

She said Mr. Dahlstrom previously served as a long-time special prosecutor to the Nation.

"His work has included the successful prosecution of 15 Navajo Nation Council delegates and two tribal employees who faced 140 criminal complaints

relating to the misuse of Navajo Nation discretionary funds,” Branch stated.

“I am satisfied that no rock was left unturned in the search for evidence of any potential wrongdoing.”

– Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch

The Attorney General reported Monday that Mr. Dahlstrom’s findings were based on thorough interviews of current and former employees.

Among those interviewed were President Nygren, Vice President Montoya, Chief of Staff Patrick Sandoval, Chief Legal Counsel Bidtah Becker and others. A telephonic and text tip line was also set up to allow members of the public to express their concerns.

President Nygren said today that he is happy his Administration and the Navajo Nation can finally put the allegation behind them, but that the Vice President needs to be held accountable.

“Sadly, this has been nothing but a disgraceful power grab from the get-go by the Vice President and her supporters,” he said. “Her false accusations and blatant lies all along have been an attempt to remove me as President. She continues to attend chapter meetings and agency council meetings sharing malicious lies with our people and continues to work closely with the ‘Recall President Nygren’ committee to attack, discredit and disparage me and my staff. Her actions have not only divided our Navajo Nation, but they hinder and undermine all the great work the Administration has done and is doing.”

President Nygren said he feels the same as he did in October when he publicly asked for the Vice President’s resignation. At the time, he said her signing of a recall petition was her announcement to the Nation that she no longer supported him nor the Administration or its goals and objectives.

“Too many of our people are suffering. We have too much work to do. Since taking office, I have given very important projects to her, and she has failed to

fulfill them and move them forward,” President Nygren said.

Her inaction only hurts the people that her assignments were meant to serve and benefit, he said.

Despite the investigation findings that absolve him of the Vice President’s allegation, President Nygren said he expects there will continue to be those who doubt and dispute the report findings and efforts by the Attorney General to ensure a fair and transparent process.

“The Attorney General is the attorney for the Navajo Nation,” he said. “I appointed her, but the Navajo Nation Council confirmed her after fully vetting her. She hired a neutral, third-party investigator to conduct the investigation. Neither the Attorney General nor my office interfered nor influenced that process. My staff and I fully cooperated and allowed Mr. Dahlstrom to do his work. I have full confidence in the process.”

Irrespective of the time Mr. Dahlstrom’s investigation took, the Attorney General said it was necessary “to ensure a full and complete analysis and recommendation by the independent, third-party counsel ... I am satisfied that no rock was left unturned in the search for evidence of any potential wrongdoing.”

Added Branch, “Now that the preliminary investigation has concluded, I intend to follow the recommendations of the independent investigator. I do not believe it is in the best interest of the Nation to continue spending the Nation’s money on allegations that, even if taken as true, would not amount to any violation of Navajo law.”

She said the investigative report will be released publicly once Navajo Nation leadership has been briefed on it.

“Even though this has been a distraction, despite all of it, I am going to continue to move our projects forward,” President Nygren said.

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