

President Begaye's line-item vetoes determined to be invalid

Written by Staff Reports
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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Oct. 3, Navajo Nation Speaker LoRenzo Bates informed President Russell Begaye that the resolution passed by the Navajo Nation Council approving the fiscal year 2017 budget for the Nation would be in place, despite Begaye's overreaching of the line-item authority.

Begaye denied funding for Navajo elders, the Nation's 110 chapters, grazing officials, and many other employees and programs for the Navajo Nation.

Begaye used the presidential line item authority on Sept. 27 to deny funding for the crucial programs that provide services to senior citizens, the 110 chapters, grazing officials, veterans, Judicial Branch, and Legislative branch despite the fact that he was in Washington D.C. — a clear violation of Navajo Nation law that states that the president is required to be within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Navajo Nation when he takes such action.

"The Navajo Nation Code clearly spells out the legal procedure and President Begaye did not comply with the procedure and therefore his line-item vetoes are invalid," Bates said.

On Oct. 3, the Office of the President and Vice President issued a press release stating that Begaye signed the budget on Sept. 24, despite the fact that OPVP also issued a press release on Sept. 28 that included the following statement:

"That sentiment was expressed on Sept. 27, when Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye executed his line item veto authority in 17 areas of the comprehensive budget that was approved by the tribal council on Sept. 8."

"It's clear that President Begaye is inconsistent and misinforming the public," Bates added. "His accusation that this is a 'frivolous' issue is unfounded. This is a serious matter that would have affected many of our people had the line-item vetoes been valid. Words have meaning and leaders must choose their words carefully."

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The Office of the Speaker delivered the memo and the legal opinion issued by the Office of Legislative Counsel to the Office of the President and Vice President on Monday afternoon despite claims in a press release from OPVP that the information was shared with the media prior to the memo being delivered.

“Our staff hand delivered the memo and the legal opinion and it was received by OPVP staff on Monday afternoon,” Bates sated. “President Begaye took an oath of office to abide by the laws of the Navajo Nation, he should follow those laws and let our elders, veterans, chapters, and others benefit from the peoples’ funds.”

OPVP’s Oct. 3 press release also stated that the Council attempted to rescind the presidential line-item veto authority, however, there has never been legislation introduced to do so. The legislation introduced was to clarify the line-item veto authority.

Bates also issued a memorandum to Dominic Beyal, director of the Office of Management and Budget, and Controller Jim Parrish informing them of Begaye’s invalid action and instructing them to carry out the budget that was approved by the Council.

“President Begaye has had the opportunity on numerous occasions to meet with Council to discuss the budget and he did not,” Bates said. “This affects our constituents, I expect the local chapters will respond to the president’s action. Delegates will be available to discuss this issue at the chapters.”