



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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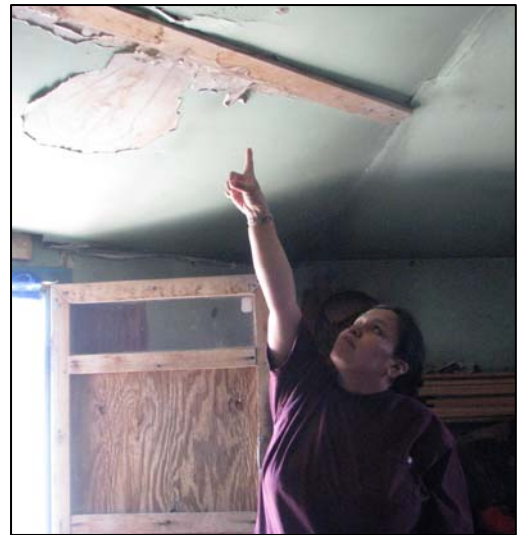
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:



Melissa Benally, 32, and her children assess the damage done to her family hogan in Burnt Corn Valley, Ariz. on March 20. Benally's hogan suffered roof damage from the recent winter weather conditions, which created unsafe living conditions to the entire structure. (Photo by Valarie Lee)

21st Navajo Nation Council overrides President Shirley's veto to help meet the needs of the Navajo people

"The immediate needs of the Navajo people needed to be addressed. The council continues working for the Navajo people and they will do what they can to address future immediate needs."

— Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The 21st Navajo Nation Council exerted their power as the governing body of the Navajo Nation by overriding a veto by Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr. amidst loud cheers and applause that erupted immediately after the passage of the override during a special session held today, March 21.

Legislation No. 0168-08 was sponsored by Council Delegate Young Jeff Tom (Mariano Lake/Smith Lake) and was the action to override President Shirley's veto of Navajo Nation Council resolution CF-06-08, the override passed by a vote of 68-8. President Shirley vetoed the legislation on Feb. 11.

The council also issued a directive to the Navajo Nation Office of Management & Budget today to immediately disburse the checks to the chapters.

The override will allow more than \$17 million to be disbursed to all 110 Navajo chapters to improve the standards of living and quality of life for many Navajo people, as well as help the communities with other projects at the chapter level.

In a letter dated March 10 to the Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan

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(Iyanbito/Pinedale), President Joe Shirley, Jr. stated that "it is my understanding that because of the automatic carryover, many chapters have acquired substantial reserves," and as a result, he vetoed resolution no. CF-06-08.

The response to Shirley's veto was immediate, as several chapters from throughout the Navajo Nation began calling their elected tribal officials stating that the money for the emergency weather conditions was greatly needed weeks ago.

Tribal members from the chapters of Huerfano, N.M.; Pueblo Pintado, N.M.; Nageezi, N.M.; Ojo Encino, N.M.; Counselor, N.M.; Hardrock, Ariz.; Tachee, Ariz.; Blue Gap, Ariz.; Whippoorwill, Ariz.; and Burnt Corn Valley, Ariz., just to name a few, came forward to express their concerns, as well as their disappointment of the veto.

These much-needed funds will definitely help families at the local level, as many continue to feel the aftermath of weather related conditions that devastated certain areas of the Navajo Nation.

The Shonie family of Whippoorwill for example, live a mile from the main road and have to deal with mud and flooding. These conditions complicate simple trips to the health clinics and shopping.

The Steve family of Burnt Corn Valley expressed their appreciation to the Navajo Council for addressing the immediate needs of the Navajo people. The Steve family home provided shelter to a 94-year-old family matriarch. The grandmother lives with her grandson and adult daughter in a small house.

The Steve family home is in desperate need of chapter assistance, their home has damaged windows, no hot running water, and the roof above the grandmother's bed is ready to collapse. The roof is held up by 2x4 lumber nailed to the ceiling.

This is proof that Navajo chapters need the funds to help people in need. The override will provide the desperately needed funds of \$3 million for home improvements at the chapter level.

Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Dennehotso) offered her sentiments prior to the override of President Shirley's veto.

Benally said that the allocated funds are "much needed and appreciated.

"Maybe the President and Vice President should drive around the Navajo Nation instead of flying by plane," Benally said. "They would see for themselves that the local chapter offices and community members are using the funds wisely."

Ella Begay, chapter official from Tachee/Blue Gap agreed. Begay said that "flying above us looking down does not show them our needs. We need funding for our students in college, for our elderly, and for our veterans—the chapters know the concerns first hand."

Katherine Benally added that "the majority of all Navajo chapters need sewer lines, electrical lines, and road maintenance. Navigating bureaucratic red-tape is costly."

Home improvements are in short supply at the chapter level as well, evident by Melissa Benally's situation. Benally is a 32-year-old mother living in Burnt Corn Valley, Ariz. and lives in emergency housing. Benally was told last week, that she has less than a month to live in her Navajo Housing Authority rental.

Benally and her three young children were sleeping in their hogan this past winter, when the entire west-side wall of the structure suddenly collapsed. The mud and water from the winter weather conditions caused the structure to be unsettled, causing cracks in her ceiling, her walls, and the outside structure.

"We lived in this hogan for more than 14 years," Benally said as she was crying.

“My children feel unsettled and displaced. I tried to ask my chapter for help and they said there was no money to help me get my home fixed.”

Council Delegate Raymond Joe (Whipoorwill/Blue Gap/Tachee) listened attentively, shaking his head, as Benally explained the challenges of her family's living conditions during a visit to her home on March 20.

Joe explained that “the sound of bulldozers and construction equipment was heard half a mile away as winter flood conditions ruined a pipe under the main roadway leading northward up into Burnt Corn Valley.”

“This is just one example of why help is needed,” Joe said with displeasure. “I wish President Shirley would visit some of these communities and see first-hand the damage, the destruction, and the helplessness his people feel—he needs to come visit these chapters that are in desperate need.”

Speaker Morgan thanked the 21st Navajo Nation Council for pushing this legislation forward and said that “the immediate needs of the Navajo people needed to be addressed. The council continues working for the Navajo people and they will do what they can to address future immediate needs.”

For more information, contact Joshua Lavar Butler with the Office of the Speaker at 928-871-6384.

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