

## Navajo Nation opposes liquor license transfer; Decision to go before county commissioners

Written by By Michele J. Crank and Mihio Manus Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President  
Friday, 01 July 2016 06:39

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During a public hearing on Jun. 27 regarding the transfer of ownership of a liquor license currently held by Tomahawk Inc., in Prewitt, Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez said the Nation does not support the transfer of Ownership to Reds Mart, LLC.

“We officially oppose this transfer,” Vice President Nez said. “It only changes the location but it does not affect the negative impact a liquor establishment has on our people. Beyond that, the liquor license will stay in close proximity to the Baca Dlo’Ayashi Community School.”

The transfer of the ownership has received preliminary approval from the director of the Alcohol and Gaming Division. The sole purpose of the public hearing, held at the McKinley County Courthouse, was to take testimony and receive evidence on whether or not the proposed transfer of Ownership should be approved or disapproved.

Vice President Nez presented resolutions from the Thoreau Chapter, Baca/Prewitt Chapter, Casamero Lake Chapter, and the Eastern Navajo Agency Council to County Attorney Douglas W. Decker opposing the proposed transfer of ownership of the liquor license to Reds Mart, LLC.

He also presented letters from the Department of Dine Education and the Office of the President and Vice President opposing the transfer.

In OPVP’s letter of opposition, President Russell Begaye stated the liquor license in question is within 300-400 feet of the Baca Dlo’Ayashi Community School, which is “completely unacceptable.”

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The Resolution from the Eastern Navajo Agency Council stated, "There are no school zone lights in the area, allowing vehicles to speed through the school zone. Many times vehicles follow closely behind the buses with no regard to the children being transported. Parents have seen individuals coming out of the Tomahawk Bar visibly drunk."

Hoskie Largo, Chapter President for Baca/Prewitt chapter said that on behalf of his constituents, he stands in opposition of the liquor license transfer.

"This liquor establishment does nothing good for our community," he said.

Geneva Werito, vice president of Baca Dlo'Ayashi Community School, also supported that the license be transferred outside of the vicinity of the school area.

"We don't want the liquor license transfer to be in the vicinity of our school," she said. "It affects the children and we want our children to be safe and get a good education."

Basel Mheirat of Red's Mart, LLC, said it was enlightening to hear the comments made at the public hearing. Mheirat said it might cause the applicant to reconsider their offer on the business and establishment based on the opinion of the community.

County Attorney Decker said he will work on recommendations based on statutory regulations.

"My desire is to have it before the Board of Commissioners at their meeting on July 5. They will go over the findings I come up with," he said. "They are the final decision makers and what they decide gets sent to Alcohol and Gaming Commissioners."

Vice President Nez said the public hearing was a good example of the Navajo community uniting to voice their opposition to the transfer of the liquor license. He said the local chapters and community members are telling the county to end alcohol sales generated through the liquor license of Tomahawk, Inc.

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Back in Aug. 3, 2015, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Nez signed off on the purchase of Ole Red Barn Liquor, which signified the end of liquor sales to the local community of Nahata Dziil near Sanders, Ariz.

For years, the impacts of liquor sales had devastated the Nahata Dziil community. In turn, the community organized alliances with tribal, county, and state agencies to effectively end alcohol sales from Ole Red Barn.

President Begaye and Vice President Nez hope to effectively see the end of liquor sales from the Tomahawk Bar.

“I hope the applicant heard the cry of the Navajo Nation,” he said. “I think we can all stand in unity, and with the help of the McKinley County Commissioners, we can say no. I respectfully ask the commissioners to heed to these words.”

***By Michele J. Crank and Mihio Manus***

***Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President***