



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., schedules 11 public meetings to educate voters on reapportionment plans for reduced council

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., has invited the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors to join him at 11 public education meetings he has scheduled to inform Navajo voters about proposed reapportionment plans that will be recommended to the Navajo Nation Council.

In a Jan. 8 letter to the board, the President said he and Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie were working together on a variety of plans for consideration. He said that rather than dispute who has authority to plan reapportionment for presentation to the council, he asks the board to work with him to implement a reapportionment plan for a 24-member Council in time for the 2010 elections based on the 2000 Census.

“The Navajo People want us to work together,” the President said. “In that spirit, my office will also invite members of the council to these meetings.”

Immediately following the Dec. 15 special election in which Navajo voters supported reducing the Navajo Nation Council to 24 delegates, a team of division directors began a series of meetings to craft several reapportionment plans.

Navajo Division of Community Development Director Arbin Mitchell said 11 plans have been devised for consideration.

President Shirley credited the division directors for working hard to get the work done quickly when others said it would take three-to-five weeks to do the same job.

“It’s obvious the people want us to act with diligence and without delay, and that’s what was done, so that they can elect a council of 24 delegates this year,” he said. “Now we’ll get this information before the public so everyone has the input they desire.”

“The Navajo People want us to work together,” the President said. “In that spirit, my office will also invite members of the Council to these meetings.”

– Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr.

President Shirley said the educational meetings will start at 9 a.m. Monday, Jan. 11, at the Shiprock Chapterhouse. Other meetings are scheduled for:

- Jan. 12, 1 p.m. at the Diné Education Center in Window Rock.
- Jan. 13, 9 a.m. at the Crownpoint, N.M., Chapterhouse.
- Jan. 14, 1 p.m. at the Dilkon Chapterhouse.
- Jan. 15, 1 p.m. at the Chinle Chapterhouse.
- Jan. 17, 9 a.m. at the Kayenta Community Center.
- Jan. 18, 9 a.m. tentatively scheduled for the Leupp Chapterhouse.
- Jan. 19, 9 a.m. at the Baahaali, N.M., Chapterhouse.
- Jan. 20, 9 a.m. at the Red Mesa Chapterhouse.
- Jan. 22, 9 a.m. at the Tuba City Chapterhouse.
- Jan. 23, 9 a.m. at the Pinon Chapterhouse.

Contrary to statements by some council delegates, President Shirley said that given the election results moving forward on the development of a reapportionment plan is appropriate, timely and fitting, and that no law limits reapportionment planning to only the Navajo Election Administration or Board of Election Supervisors.

Title 11, Section 9, of the Navajo Nation Code states that the council shall designate the number and location of precincts with recommendations from the Navajo Nation Board of Election Supervisors.

"However, this law does not give sole authority to the board to authorize reapportionment," President Shirley said. "In fact, the board cannot introduce legislation to adopt a plan unless a council delegate sponsors it.

In the 2002 Resolution CJN-50-02, the council explicitly called upon the Office of the President to assist with reapportionment efforts.

The President added that the council has allowed other entities to be involved in reapportionment activities such as the when the Education Committee was involved in school board reapportionment.

"Precedent is well established regarding reapportionment, and there is no justifiable reason to delay implementation of the will of the people until after the completion of the Federal 2010 Census," he said.

The President said that last year, NEA Director Edison Wauneka said he did not budget funds for the special election because it had been challenged by the Office of Legislative Counsel and, at the time, was before the Navajo Nation Supreme Court.

"In hindsight, that was a mistake that put the election in jeopardy, and one that the Nation can avoid making again by all of us diligently getting to work on the reapportionment plan to be approved by the Navajo

Nation Council without further delay," he said. "In our teachings, our elders tell us there are no impossibilities, and we have seen that teaching hold true time and again over the past year and a half."

Recent news releases from the Navajo Nation Council Speaker's office have inaccurately stated that the President's office neglected to develop a reapportionment plan by a specific date. The releases cite petition language that was outdated after the election was delayed by legal challenges from the Speaker's office and again after the NBOES modified the ballot language in October.

The releases omit noting that the original language stated the dates to develop reapportionment plans would be applicable, "upon approval of this initiative." That approval did not occur until Dec. 15, 2009.

In a May 8, 2008, Navajo Times news story, one week after the two government reform initiatives were announced, Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan was reported as saying the council reduction initiative was a sign of President Shirley's unwillingness to diplomatically work with the council.

Now that the election has occurred, President Shirley said he's hopeful the council and NEA will work with him to quickly implement the changes approved by Navajo voters.

The Speaker also said in a statement, "If anything, the Navajo people will lose their voice in the tribal government under the proposed initiative."

On Dec. 24, the Intergovernmental Relations Committee appropriated \$150,000 to a non-profit group to hire a lawyer to contest the Dec. 15 special election.

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