



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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October 22, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Nation Council concludes its 2008 Fall Session

Navajo Nation Healthy Start Act of 2008 passes unanimously

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The 21st Navajo Nation Council concluded its 2008 Fall Session today, and voted on four pieces of legislation.

The Council voted unanimously, with a vote of 64-0, in favor of the Navajo Nation Healthy Start Act of 2008. The act was sponsored by Alice W. Benally (Crownpoint/Nahodishgish) and Jerry Freddie (Dilcon/Teesto).

“We now have a law which supports the importance of breastfeeding, which will ultimately emphasize to our Navajo mothers how significant the act of breastfeeding is to nurturing our Navajo children,” Benally said. “This truly is a healthy start for our young children — the name of the act says it all.”

The legislation required Navajo Nation employers to offer flexible breaks for breast feeding mothers as well as a clean and enclosed private area for breastfeeding and pumping breast milk, among other things.

“We now have a law to inform women on their behalf,” said Ora Nez, a breastfeeding peer counselor who is part of the Fort Defiance Breastfeeding Taskforce. Before voting took place, several council members raised concerns as to whether the legislation could set Navajo Nation employers up for possible litigation; however, it was explained it would not, since the legislation states it would be deemed an adverse action against the employee, if the employer did not comply with it. The law will be enforced by Navajo Labor Relations.

The Council also voted 63-14 in favor to amend Title Ten of the Navajo Nation Code, section 106, relating to education. The legislation was sponsored by Willie Tracey Jr. (Ganado/Kinlichee) and Leonard Chee (Birdsprings/Leupp/Tolani Lake). The legislation ultimately helps to fine tune how the Navajo Nation conducts lobbying efforts in education with the county, state and with the federal government.

The Navajo Nation Code, section 484 (B) (6), states the Navajo Nation Education Committee will “represent the Navajo Nation in consultation with federal, state and local officials regarding any proposed changes in educational programs, including additions, deletions, school closures, consolidations and the like.”

“This legislation clarifies the role of the Education Committee and the Board of Education as far as lobbying efforts is concerned,” said Chee.



Harold Morgan Dishnei, Legislative Assistant with the Office of Legislative Services, rings the bell at the Navajo Council Chambers to signal the start of day three of the 2008 Fall Session on Oct. 22, 2008. (Photo by Joshua Lavar Butler)

Since the Board of Education was established, the split duties between the board and the Education Committee have become hazy. The legislation now clearly separates the duties of the board and the committee.

The Board of Education is still authorized to solicit funds, propose budgets, do plans of operation, create positions, establish organization relationships, and employ and supervise personnel through a chain of command. The legislation now states they are not authorized to represent the Navajo Nation in consultation with federal, state and local officials regarding educational matters, which is already stated as the sole responsibility of the Education Committee of the Navajo Nation Council.

Amending the legislation became of pinnacle concern after the Education Committee was contacted by New Mexico Congressman Tom Udall's office, who expressed confusion as to who they were supposed to work with in the area of lobbying educational issues on behalf of the Navajo Nation.

"This legislation will develop a single position system with our congressman and congresswomen," Tracey explained. "It will fine tune how we coordinate business and will help to alleviate confusion on how we lobby."

Tracey said the legislation will allow the board to focus on crucial issues in Navajo schools, like addressing attendance policies and creating strong curriculum.

"We certainly appreciate the efforts of the Board of Education and we will continue to look to them for their insight and recommendations on how to improve education on the Navajo Nation," said Tracey.

In other Council action today, legislation to amend Navajo Nation Code Title 5, Section 1603 unanimously passed by a Council vote of 61-0. The legislation created the position title of Chief Executive Officer of the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry (NAPI) and eliminated the position title of general manager. The legislation was sponsored by LoRenzo C. Bates (Upper Fruitland) and Ervin M. Keeswood Sr. (Tse Daa Kaan).

"The legislation better clarifies the position responsibilities," said Bates.

The Council voted 43-23 to table legislation which would amend Title Three of the Navajo Nation Code, sections 60 and 70, which would change the plan of operation for farm boards.

Many council members expressed they would like the language to be closely looked at and would like to educate their community members on the proposed legislation. It will be included on the upcoming Winter Session agenda. It was sponsored by Norman John II (Twin Lakes).

This concluded the 2008 Fall Session of the 21st Navajo Nation Council; the approved legislations have been signed by the Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan and will be sent to Joe Shirley Jr., president of the Navajo Nation, for his signature.