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Delegate Butler introduces legislation opposing the use of disparaging references to Native People by professional sports franchises

WINDOW ROCK—Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) has introduced Legislation No. 0078-14, opposing the use of disparaging references to Native People by professional sports franchises.

The legislation was posted on the Navajo Nation Council’s website on March 13 for the five-day comment period and will become available for committee action on March 19.

The legislation seeks to establish an official position of the Navajo Nation to oppose the use of such derogatory terms as “Redskins,” as used by the Washington Redskins—a professional football team of the National Football Association.

Language in the legislation states that several professional sports franchises, including the Washington Redskins, continue to utilize references to Native Americans in mascots and team names. The term “redskin” or “redskins” originated from a time when bounties were offered for the murder of Native Americans and their scalps turned in for money.

“The use of terms referencing Native Americans in professional sports has a negative psychological effect on Native Americans,” said Delegate Butler. “Such terms only promote low self-esteem and self-image in Native youth who are already disadvantaged by social ills beyond their control.”

According to a 2004 report by Stephanie A. Fryberg of Stanford University, usage of such terms actually promotes and increases the self-esteem of non-native people.

Today, tribes across the country fight against higher-than-average statistics of suicide, violence against Native women, racial and hate crimes, poverty, unemployment, and with the loss of Native identity and culture, according to language within the legislation.

“The continued usage of Native American mascots and team names in professional sports franchises is damaging to Native Americans. Such usage only perpetuates racism, stereotyping, ignorance and misrepresentation of indigenous peoples,” stated Delegate Butler.

U.S. Congressman Eni Fa’aua’a Hunkin Faleomavaega Jr. of American Samoa has introduced legislation that would prohibit the registration of new trademarks using the term “redskin” or “redskins,” and would provide a mechanism to petition for the cancellation of existing trademarks using disparaging epithets.

“It is time for the Navajo Nation to finally take a firm position on this national issue that hurts Indian Country. The Navajo Nation can no longer afford to sit back and remain neutral on this issue,” added Delegate Butler. “We have found that our lack of action on this topic undermines our overall advocacy efforts at the state and federal government levels and it affects our inter-tribal relations as well. We must make a strong position and say enough is enough. It’s about time the largest tribe in the United States speaks and is heard across this land.”

The Naabik’iyáti’ Committee serves as the final authority for the legislation.

A digital copy of the legislation is available online at <http://www.navajonationcouncil.org/Legislations/2014/MAR/0078-14.pdf>.

Digital comments may be emailed to comments@navajo-nsn.gov, written comments may be mailed to the executive director of the Office of Legislative Services at P.O. Box 3390, Window Rock, AZ 86515.

Comments may be in the form of chapter resolutions, letters or position papers. You must include your name, position title, address for written comments and a valid email address is required. Anonymous comments will not be included in the legislation packet.

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