



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council approves referendum to allow the Navajo people to decide chapter regionalization initiative

WINDOW ROCK – With a vote of 11-6, the Navajo Nation Council on Monday approved Legislation No. 0220-16, which seeks the approval of a referendum measure that would allow registered Navajo voters to decide whether or not the Navajo Nation should regionalize the 110 chapters into 24 regional governments. If approved by the president, voters will decide the outcome of the referendum measure that would likely be placed on the ballot in November.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), who sponsored the legislation told his Council colleagues that voting in favor of the legislation did not necessarily mean they were in support of the regionalization concept, but that it would empower the Navajo people to determine their form of local governance.

“This promotes a democratic measure to allow the people to vote on regionalization,” stated Delegate Tsosie.

In May 2015, the Resources and Development Committee established the Title 26 Task Force for the purpose of reviewing accountability measures at the chapter level, exploring ways to empower chapters, and to streamline the Five Management Plan System and transparency. The task force met regularly and discussed the development of the regionalization concept.

The Navajo Nation currently has 110 local governing chapters that operate under various forms of government. Under terms outlined in the legislation, the chapters would be reorganized into 24 regional governments.

If voters approve the referendum, the Council would then be authorized to pass enabling legislation to amend Title 26 of the Navajo Nation Code to implement the transition from chapter governments to regional governments within a four-year period.

Delegate Tsosie said the four-year transition period would allow time to determine the budgets, personnel issues, qualifications, and other matters related to the transition.

The Council also approved an amendment to overstrike language that stated that each chapter with less than 1,000 registered voters would be represented by one commissioner and chapters

with more than 1,000 registered voters would be represented by two commissioners, citing the need for flexibility in determining the number of commissioners to ensure balanced representation for communities with larger and smaller populations.

Moments prior to voting on the legislation, Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) urged his colleagues to vote down the legislation and cautioned against rushing the initiative through the process.

“We are jumping into this too fast and we should not be doing that,” said Delegate Yazzie. “We need more information and we need the facts.”

Delegate Tsosie said the regionalization concept will be debated on the radio, newspapers, and in chapter meetings which would allow the public to become more informed and educated on the issue prior to voting on the referendum.

For the referendum to pass, it would require majority approval from all registered voters who cast a ballot. At the conclusion of the discussion, Council members vote 11-6 in favor of the legislation.

President Russell Begaye will have ten calendar days to consider the Council resolution once it is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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