



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Resources and Development Committee receives report on proposed referendum to reform chapter governments

WINDOW ROCK – On Wednesday, the Resources and Development Committee received a report from the Office of Navajo Government Development regarding Legislation No. 0271 -18, which seeks to approve and authorize an election referendum to allow Navajo voters to determine whether Navajo Nation chapter governments should be reformed by establishing cooperative governance centers.

The Office of Navajo Government Development executive director Edward Dee explained that the referendum language would ask whether chapter governments should be reformed into 23 cooperative governance centers, with an addition to one Navajo urban cooperative governance center. If the referendum passes, it would call for the Council to enact enabling legislation to amend Title 26 and other laws applicable in the Navajo Nation Code.

In May 2015, the RDC established the Title 26 Task Force to review accountability measures at the chapter levels and to explore options to empower chapters. Members of the task force include the Office of Navajo Government Development, Navajo Nation Department of Justice, Office of the Auditor General, the Ethics and Rules Office, Department of Personnel Management, Navajo Land Department, and the Administrative Service Centers.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), who is the sponsor of the legislation, stated that there are many problems with the current structure of the 110 chapter governments and that the concept of cooperative governance centers could mend the issues.

“Currently, we are having serious corrective action problems at the chapters. There are many cases of mismanagement of funds and Navajo citizens are not receiving services. The issue of favoritism at the chapters is also getting worse and people avoid going to chapter meetings. The referendum would allow the people to decide their own form of local government,” said Delegate Tsosie.

RDC member Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) stated that he supports the referendum because it presents an opportunity for Navajo citizens to talk and debate chapter reform.

“The people should have the opportunity to take a position regarding chapter reform. However, if approved, would certified chapters and township governments be affected by the reform?” asked Delegate Phelps.

According to Dee, if approved, certified chapter governments would be a part of the chapter reform transition and township governments would not be affected. The transition would consist of chapters to combine with other chapters based on common geographical areas and common interest, added Dee.

RDC member Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahi, Whiterock) recommended the Title 26 Task Force to provide extensive public outreach and education to inform Navajo citizens regarding the referendum.

“There are many questions and concerns regarding this initiative. However, we can all agree that there are many challenges at the local governments. I strongly encourage the task force to educate as many Navajo citizens through public hearings and the media until the general election,” said Delegate Perry.

The Resources and Development Committee approved the report with a 3-0 vote.

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