



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 23, 2018

MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee support redesignation of Navajo Veterans Advisory Council to a commission

WINDOW ROCK – On Thursday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee met in a special meeting to consider Legislation No. 0467-17, which seeks to redesignate the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council to a Navajo Nation Veterans Board of Commissioners.

The legislation states that the current advisory council is pursuing the change because it is limited in its authority to properly execute the needs of Navajo veterans, and would like a stronger role in presiding over formal recommendations to the Office of the President and Vice President on issues relating to funding, housing, Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, policies, regulations, and any other matters concerning Navajo veterans.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) said the proposed commission would ensure that direct services are carried out effectively to Navajo veterans rather than just serving in an advisory role with limited participation on veterans issues.

“I am here today with the Veterans Advisory Council and other veterans organizations. The legislation talks to changing the advisory council and to make them a board of commissioners because right now everything goes through the President, and his office does not wholly give consideration to their recommendations,” said Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr.

According to the legislation, the proposed Board of Commissioners would be comprised of 10 agency commanders, one female and one male from each of the Navajo Nation’s five area agencies and would be the designated voting members. The director of the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration and a Blue or Gold Star Mother, or a disabled veteran, would be non-voting members of the commission.

Speaking as an agent for the legislation, Fort Defiance Veterans Agency Organization Commander Olin Kieyoomia shared concerns regarding the state of the Navajo Veterans Advisory Council, the lack of a permanent executive director for the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, housing funds, and lack of legal counsel to aid in navigating policy development for the advisory council.

“The veterans administration reports to the President and his chief of staff, but they don’t inform the advisory council. They have not come to us, and we had no hand in our budget this year. As an advisory entity through law, we are supposed to be included and we weren’t. We have yet to meet with the President since the advisory council was created, and now the budget is where it’s at now because we’re not involved,” said Kieyoomia.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’izhí) said he supports the proposed commission, however he raised concerns regarding the lack of communication to all Navajo veterans organizations.

“We have to look at these things carefully and sensitively so we do this correctly and we don’t keep changing this down the road. If we do make you commissioners, how will the communication improve so other veterans organizations don’t hear about these things by word of mouth? How will you interpret this information to veterans, especially the elder veterans? These are considerations you must make moving forward,” said Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye.

In response to the communication concerns, Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. said the local veterans organizations would reach out to as many Navajo veterans organizations and provide presentations to them so they are educated on the proposed Navajo Nation Veterans Board of Commissioners, housing, funding, and other related issues.

“I am asking the veterans commanders to educate the organizations as much as they can, especially when it comes to the housing, issues on the state and federal level, and a nomination of an advisory council at the national level,” said Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to approve Legislation No. 0467-17, with one amendment to insert clarifying language into the bill. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the legislation.

###

For news on the latest legislative branch activities, please visit www.navajonationcouncil.org or find us on Facebook and Twitter, keywords: Navajo Nation Council