



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

Contact: Alastair Lee Bitsoi, Acting Communications Director

Phone: (928) 871-6384

Cell: (928) 255-2946

Fax: (928) 871-7255

abitsoi@navajo.org

navajocouncil_pio@yahoo.com

www.navajonationcouncil.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Speaker Pro Tem Nez encourages chapters to bring forward priorities, while Council discusses committee restructuring

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Honorable Speaker Pro Tem Jonathan Nez has encouraged Navajo Nation chapter governments to collaborate with each other and bring forward recommendations to address the needs of the Navajo people. Currently, the 22nd Navajo Nation Council is meeting in Window Rock to discuss important priorities and council restructuring during this transition from an 88-member body to a 24-member council. Speaker Pro Tem Nez finds this an opportune time for chapter officials to also convene and identify concerns and priorities from each community.

"Chapter governments who may have one Council delegate to six chapters, for example, are encouraged to schedule a meeting with their delegate at one chapter location," Speaker Pro Tem Nez said. "These meetings would help us identify concerns and priorities for each community. It is important for our chapter officials and governments to work together during this new beginning."

"All 110 Navajo Nation chapter governments are encouraged to exercise local community and economic empowerment," added Speaker Pro Tem Nez. "More autonomy at the local level is a necessary requirement to better serve the Navajo people."

The 22nd Navajo Nation Council has identified committee restructuring and the adoption of the 2011 Navajo Nation Comprehensive Budget as its top priorities for the next few weeks.

During the morning work session, the 24-member council began discussion about possible plans for committee restructuring, which requires amendments to Title 2 of the Navajo Nation Code. In present form, Title 2 accommodates an 88-member legislature and not a 24-member legislative body.

"Committee restructuring of the Legislative Branch is of one of the most important issues this new Council has to resolve," said Nez. "Currently, under Title 2, standing committees receive pieces of legislation from the speaker, who assigns legislation to proper oversight committees. Pieces of legislation then must pass each assigned standing committees in order to proceed to the agenda of a regular session or special session. If any pieces of legislation pass the Council floor, then legislation goes across to the Navajo Office of the President for review to become law."

The work session began with the Diné Policy Institute presenting its recommendations for committee restructuring, which includes the consolidation of the current law's 11 standing committees:

1. Budget and Finance Committee, (B&F), Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) and Government Services Committee (GSC)
2. Public Safety Committee (PSC), Judiciary Committee (JC) and Ethic and Rules Committee

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3. Resources Committee (RC), Transportation and Community Development Committee (TCDC) and Economic Development Committee (EDC).
4. Humans Services Committee (HSC), Health and Social Services Committee (HSSC) and Education Committee (EC)

The 21st Navajo Nation Council's IGR Transition Taskforce also presented recommendations for committee restructuring. The IGR Transition Taskforce offered the following four recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

BFC
PSC and JC
TCDC and EDC
RC
HSC and HSSC
Rules (ERC)
GSC and EC

Recommendation 2:

BFC
PSC and JC
TCDC and EDC
RC
GSC, HSC and HSSC
EC and Rules
IGR

Recommendation 3:

BFC
PSC and JC
TCDC, RC and EDC
HSC and HSSC
EC
ERC and GSC

Recommendation 4:

BFC
PSC and JC
EC, HC and HSSC
RC
Misc.-- TCDC, EDC, IGR, ERC, GSC

Speaker Pro Tem Nez encouraged members of the new Council to provide their insights on how committees should be restructured.

Honorable Leonard Tsosie said his recommendation consists of merging the 11 standing committees to four committees.

"My recommendation is to have four committees because it's a sacred number in the Navajo universe. In addition to the four committees, there will be select committees," said Tsosie. "The select committees will be subject to what the Council deems is important. For example, there would be a select committee on gaming and a select committee on government reform. Advisory members will also attend meetings on behalf of a delegate who's unable to attend a meeting."

Honorable Elmer Begay recommended chapters to be involved in the restructuring process.

"Chapter involvement is important to this political process. LGA certified chapters are very interested in taxation and approving business site leases," said Mr. Begay. "Other chapters are ready for economic development. Some of these chapters have scheduled DPI and the Office of Navajo Government Development to present their recommendations for committee restructuring. Working with chapters is important to eliminating bureaucracy to continue their local governance."

"We appreciate the patience from our chapter officials during this time of transition," added Speaker Pro Tem Nez, who became speaker pro tem when the 22nd Navajo Nation Council convened for the first time during a special session Jan. 11. "The new Council may determine if certain authorities will be delegated to divisions and departments, including chapters. Chapter officials need to anticipate more responsibility."