



The 21st Navajo Nation Council

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

IGR Committee hears concerns from Diné College students regarding high court's decision, students encourage removal of Chief Justice Yazzie

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Intergovernmental Relations Committee heard a report on Monday from Diné College students expressing concern of the Navajo Supreme Court's recent decision in *Ferlin Clark vs. Diné College*, which removed Clark as president of Diné College. The high court's decision also reinstated three members of the Diné College Board of Regents, who were removed by the Government Services Committee on April 26.

Georgette Cook, a student body representative on the Diné College of Board of Regents, along with other students, went before the IGR Committee as a last resort to have elected leaders listen to their concerns, which they felt the high court neglected to address in its decision.

"The Board of Regents that were removed by the Government Services Committee convened on Saturday without a quorum and voided the contracts of those faculty members that were fired," Cook said. "The Board of Regents is acting out of their capacity as human resource managers. The Supreme Court is allowing these individuals to have more authority than Council delegates. We come here because this is our last hope to have our voices heard."

On April 26, the Government Services Committee removed three Diné College Board of Regents members after nearly two years of unrest at the college. Those members removed by the GSC and reinstated by the high court on Oct. 27 are Fannie L. Atcitty, Loretta Draper and Clinton Jim.

Cook, as well as other students, encouraged members of the IGR Committee to consider removing Chief Justice Herb Yazzie from the high court and to override President Joe Shirley's veto of the Diné College Board of Regents Act of 2010. The Navajo Nation Council passed the Diné College Board of Regents Act of 2010 in an effort to provide a learning environment conducive for students attending the college.

However, the act was vetoed on Oct. 21 by President Shirley on grounds that the resolution lacked sufficient information about the impacts it would have on Diné College. The act, which is subject to Council override, would change the appointment of the Board of Regents to elected positions, except for ad hoc positions, for the best interests of students, faculty and administration at Diné College.

Students also said they are fearful that many of the former employees rehired by the Board of Regents could repeat offenses such as tampering with student grades.

As a result of the high court's decision and president's veto, the students encouraged the IGR members to override the veto because the veto and court's decision makes Diné College more hostile. The students also reported that Chief Justice Yazzie and Patterson Joe, legal counsel for Diné College, are close friends who worked jointly to oust Clark and encouraged the removal of the chief justice.

Several IGR members, including Kee Allen Begay and Ervin Keeswood expressed concern over elected leaders and high ranking officials not listening to the student voice.

"High ranking officials and elected leaders take the position that every matter is for the best interest of the Navajo people and that is not the case at Diné College," said Begay, who is chair for the Judiciary Committee. "I cannot say the opinion of the high court is wrong, but the fact that the playmakers in the court system have failed to act in the best interest of the students is a concern. The students of Diné College need to be heard."

Mr. Keeswood, chair for the GSC, recommended the respective standing committees to take proper action as soon as possible to address the student voice. The IGR Committee unanimously accepted the report, 8-0.

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