



## The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

Contact: Joshua Lavar Butler, Communications Director

Phone: (928) 871-6384

Cell: (928) 255-2946

Fax: (928) 871-7255

[joshualavarbutler@navajo.org](mailto:joshualavarbutler@navajo.org)

[joshualavarbutler@yahoo.com](mailto:joshualavarbutler@yahoo.com)

[www.navajonationcouncil.org](http://www.navajonationcouncil.org)

January 21, 2010

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Navajo Election Administration, Board of Election Supervisors get support from Navajo Nation Council**

*"We need to reaffirm that we will not entertain other plans not by the election board. Joe Shirley has so much to do to meet the needs of our people, yet he has time to develop 10 reapportionment plans."*

*– Leonard Chee, Navajo Nation Council delegate*

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – The 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council met today during a work session with the Navajo Election Administration and the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors regarding the Navajo Nation Code Provisions on Reapportionment for a 24 member Navajo Nation Council.

Larry Biltah, chairperson of the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors, and Edison Wauneka, executive director of the Navajo Election Administration, informed the Council of their plans for the next year.

Wauneka said the Election Administration's goal for 2010 encompasses preparation for the 2010 Navajo Nation General Election. He explained 88 Council seats will be available for the upcoming election until noted otherwise.

"The next project is working on the general election," Wauneka said. "The number of Council delegates being advertised for the 2010 General Election is 88 seats -- 88 is the only approved number. As long as it's like that we are going to be giving out packets for 88."

Though there is consensual agreement that the appeal by the grassroots organization Diné for Fairness in Government will get automatically dismissed by the Navajo Supreme Court due to an allegiance between the Judicial and Executive branches – Attorney General Louis Denetsosie and Chief Justice Herb Yazzie were appointed by President Joe Shirley Jr. -- a few Council delegates expressed the need for opponents of Council reduction to consider other venues to hear their case and they suggested an idea of the federal government hearing the appeal due to violation of federal voting rights and chaos in the government.

However, the situation this time is completely different so there is no need for federal involvement said Council Delegate Johnny Naize.

Naize informed his colleagues of the unique challenge the Navajo Nation is facing and recommended the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors hire an attorney to fight the pressure and stressed to his fellow delegates to uphold Navajo sovereignty.

"I think right now, the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors needs legal counsel to get through this situation," Naize explained. "This is one of the tests we have to go through regarding our sovereignty. We need to keep this issue on the Navajo Nation and keep other jurisdictions out!"

Despite pressure from multi-faceted proponents of Council reduction, specifically the media, President Shirley, and the Navajo Courts, the Election Office is still upholding Navajo Nation statutes and closely examining the 11 N.N.C. § 9 statute regarding the reapportionment and certification process.

Council Delegate Jerry Bodie highlighted the importance of the statute and said, "The population of 10 years ago has changed drastically. Each agency has a different population from 10 years ago. It doesn't make sense to use data from 10 years ago."

Bodie is one of the many delegates who cited the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors' enumerated power to sustain the laws of the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay (Rough Rock/Many Farms) also affirmed the amount of pressure the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors is currently experiencing, and said, "I will stress again that the election office is following the law. The election board will need to act independently, ignore all pressures. I oppose this issue on Council reduction because the President is doing it for self gain. But at the end, our people had an opportunity with the Council to challenge the initiatives."

Council Delegate Leonard Chee (Leupp/ Birdsprings/Tolani Lake) echoed similar words supporting the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors in whatever decision they will make on reapportionment in accordance to tribal law.

"We need to reaffirm that we will not entertain other plans not by the election board. Joe Shirley has so much to do to meet the needs of our people, yet he has time to develop 10 reapportionment plans," Chee said. "That's not right since plans are to come from the people and appropriate entities. I think this Council needs to affirm its support to the Navajo Election Supervisors to make a good decision."

For now, the election office does not have a complete plan for reapportionment until the Diné for Fairness for Government lawsuit is settled and the special elections results are certified.

"We appreciate the support from the Navajo Nation Council. As long as I'm recognizing work according to the law there is no way to deviate from that. I will continue to do that as director of the Navajo Election Administration," said Wauneka.

###