



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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“Diné Nation” legislation fails to garner enough support

WINDOW ROCK – On the second day of the 2017 Spring Council Session, Legislation No. 0395-16 failed to garner enough support from the Navajo Nation Council. The bill sought to amend Title II of the Navajo Nation Code for the purpose of changing the designated name of the Navajo Nation to “Diné Nation.”

During the Winter Council Session in January, the Council tabled the legislation along with a directive to hold a work session to hear perspectives from others such as the elderly and the Navajo Code Talker Association. Council members also requested cost estimates on implementing the name change, chapter resolutions to assess the public’s input, and additional research on the origin of the word, “Diné.”

Legislative sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) stated that the name change would only apply to the Navajo Nation government including departments, divisions, agencies, entities, and enterprises.

“The name change would only reflect the Navajo Nation government. Other non-governmental entities would not be affected by the change, such as the Navajo Code Talkers. This was the request of our youth,” stated Delegate Hale.

The legislation states that all correspondence, stationary, and letterheads of Navajo government entities would use “Diné Nation” rather than “Navajo Nation.”

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) opposed the name change, stating that it would create confusion and frustration among Navajo citizens and non-Navajos.

“I thought there was a main intent for the name change, but it would only apply to the tribal government, not everyone. This will confuse and frustrate many people. We should be discussing more important things on the Council floor today, such as the obstacles and the needs of the Navajo people,” stated Tsosie.

During Tuesday’s discussion, Council Delegate Norman M. Begay (Alamo, Ramah, Tohajilee) proposed an amendment to exempt the communities of Alamo, Tohajilee, and Ramah from the adopting the name change, stating that the chapters did not have enough time to discuss and consider the name change.

“The proposed amendment will only create more confusion. The Navajo Nation is one nation and no chapter should separate themselves,” stated Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) in opposition of the amendment, which eventually failed with a vote of 6-17.

A letter dated April 12 from the Navajo Nation Office of Controller to the Council, stated that in order to replace calendars, promotional items, stationery, stationery supply forms, and office supply promotions would cost the Navajo Nation government approximately \$57,000.

In support of the legislation, Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tófikán, Red Mesa) stated that the name change would be a positive change for the Nation.

“The word ‘Navajo’ is not our people’s word. The term is not apart of our traditional language. The Spaniards and the federal government gave us that identity as ‘Navajo’. Diné College has created a positive model for us to follow. One day, we will change our name like the college,” stated Delegate Filfred.

Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) stated that the name change would not promote a comprehensive purpose and meaning.

“I do not support the name change because it is a mixture of two languages. The word ‘Diné’ is a traditional term and ‘Nation’ is an English term. ‘Diné Nation’ is not a complete thought and it would only create more confusion for our youth,” stated Delegate Chee.

Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) recommended that the Navajo public through a referendum election vote on the proposed name change.

“They have the right to decide how to address themselves and the tribal government. This legislation could be a referendum,” stated Phelps.

At the conclusion of Tuesday’s debate, the Navajo Nation Council voted down Legislation No. 0395-16 by a vote of 9-14. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority for the bill.

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