23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation requests the state of New Mexico to designate U.S. Route 491 as "Chief Manuelito Highway"

WINDOW ROCK – On Thursday, the Naabik'íyáti' Committee approved Legislation No. 0183-17, which officially establishes the position of the Navajo Nation in requesting the state of New Mexico to honor former Navajo leader, Chief Manuelito, by designating U.S. Route 491 as the "Chief Manuelito Highway."

U.S. Route 491 stretches approximately 194-miles between Monticello, Utah, and Gallup, N.M., serving numerous Navajo the communities including Shiprock, Newcomb, Sheep Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, and Twin Lakes.

Legislative sponsor Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) stated that the highway designation would honor Chief Manuelito and the history of the Navajo people.

"Chief Manuelito lived from 1818 to 1893 and he was a leader for the Navajo people before and after the Long Walk. Manuelito negotiated and advocated for our Navajo people to return to their homelands. His legacy is greatly appreciated and honored within the Navajo Nation and the highway designation will illustrate the honor, pride, and strength of the Navajo people," stated Delegate Tsosie.

New Mexico State Transportation commissioner Jackson Gibson, joined Delegate Tsosie as the legislation was presented before the Naabik'íyáti' Committee. Gibson stated that the route has been reconstructed continuously since 2008 with a cost of nearly $300 million to improve the highway. The highway construction is scheduled for completion by September and the name change would reflect the improvement of the highway, added Gibson.

Gibson also pointed out that Delegate Tsosie played a major role in advocating for the completion of U.S. 491, when he served as a state senator in the New Mexico State Legislature.

During Thursday's discussion, Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) proposed to use Chief Manuelito's Navajo name as the designation to promote Navajo language and culture.

"I strongly believe that we should use his Navajo name, so our Navajo children and non-Navajo visitors can be aware of our unique language. The Navajo name will encourage our children to

learn the language. Some of our local chapter governments also changed their community names to Navajo names," stated Delegate Hale.

Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahi, Whiterock) recommended using "Chief Manuelito Highway" as the official name designation to prevent any delays in emergency response times for first responders.

"If Chief Manuelito's Navajo name is used, many people will not be able to pronounce his name. What if an emergency occurs, and the person calling for emergency assistance cannot pronounce the name? That is a serious liability and we should highly consider safety first," stated Delegate Perry.

The Naabik'íyáti' Committee approved an amendment with a vote of 8-4, to support "Chief Manuelito Highway" as the highway name designation.

The Naabik'íyáti' Committee approved Legislation No. 0183-17 with a 12-0 vote with one amendment and serves as the final authority for the bill.

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