



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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President Shelly makes a stand for Navajo language, vetoes council resolution



Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly vetoed Resolution No. CO-47-14 and said the decision to amend the language requirements of the Navajo Nation Election Code must be done through a referendum vote brought before the Navajo people. Their voices must be heard, he said. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—In an independent action to preserve the laws, President Ben Shelly vetoed Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CO-47-14 this afternoon.

“The decision to amend the language requirements in Title 11, the Navajo Nation Election Code, must be brought before the Navajo people through a referendum vote,” President Shelly said. “This decision is far too important and it is one the people need to decide on.

“We are a nation of laws. I took an oath to uphold the law,” he added.

The Office of the President and Vice President received the

legislation on Oct. 24, 2014 at 10:56 p.m. By a vote of 11-10, the 22nd Navajo Nation Council passed the resolution after midnight the same day to amend the language requirements of the

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Navajo Nation Election Code.

The vote was knotted at 10-10 before Speaker Pro Tem LoRenzo Bates cast the deciding vote to approve the amendments. The amendments by council are

the first major overhaul to the election code since 1990.

The amended language to Navajo Nation Code, Title 11, Subsection 8 regarding qualifications to hold office as President and Vice President states, “Must fluently speak and understand Navajo and read and write English, which language proficiency shall be determined by the People voting in favor of the person upon the right and freedom of the Diné to choose their leaders.”

Other similar language amendments were made to the qualification requirements for candidates running for council delegate, chapter official, land board, farm board, district grazing committee, school board and Navajo Nation Board of Education.

President Shelly said while the language amendments are a step in the right direction, other considerations must be taken into account, such as the possibility of a woman president and the language requirement for other offices, such as council delegate.

He said rather than a piecemeal approach to amending concerns with the Navajo Nation Election Code that instead, tribal leaders

mired in debate and controversy over issues regarding the fluency qualifications of candidates for elected office,” President Shelly said.

The Sept. 26, 2014 decision by the Navajo Nation Supreme Court provided an interpretation of the meaning of and standard for fluency. He said this should be the standard until the people have been consulted.

“Diné bizaad is sacred. Navajo leaders should have both language and cultural fluency in order to qualified. Every society has an obligation to hold onto their traditions,” President Shelly said.

Despite the divisive nature of the requirements, he said it is essential that this fundamental issue be addressed through a referendum vote brought before the Navajo people to decide on.

He said the Navajo Nation must commit resources to ensure that Navajo children know and understand their language and culture. This could be achieved by the next administration through employee programs, school programs, technology and interaction between Navajo elders and youth.

“The Navajo Nation Supreme Court ordered the 2014 ballots to be reprinted and the election unavoidably rescheduled to ensure a valid election. I therefore exercise my veto authority,” President Shelly said.

