



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 16, 2018

MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee affirms Navajo Nation's sovereign status as a political government, not a racial group

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee unanimously approved Legislation No. 0152-18 to affirm the constitutionally recognized political distinctions of “Native American, Indian, and Indian Tribes” as political and governmental entities, and not racial classifications.

The legislation states that in the international community, the Navajo Nation and the Diné are recognized as a sovereign indigenous Nation and is deemed more than a civil society due to the Navajo Nation having a functional government with elected leaders, its own natural resources and energy, and an ancestral land area.

HEHSC chair and legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said that recent statements by President Trump to consider Native Americans as a racial group rather than a sovereign government is wrong and should be opposed by the Navajo Nation, as well as Indian Country who share the same unique governmental status.

“The Navajo Nation public needs to take the proposals by the Trump administration seriously. We are always under attack and with his statements, it would be no surprise that legislation could be introduced. The nation needs to support other tribal leadership on such policy statements because it could affect the Navajo Nation,” said Delegate Hale.

Delegate Hale added that scholarship funding and health services are already being adversely affected due to policy changes made by the Trump Administration and congressional action, including federal agencies such as the Centers for Medicaid/Medicare Services, which has stated that the political distinction of Native Americans is a form of racial preference that could result in racial discrimination.

The legislation would also direct the Navajo Nation Attorney General to enter a formal response to the Centers for Medicaid/Medicare Services regarding the Navajo Nation's sovereign status, and would direct Navajo leadership and the Navajo Nation Washington Office to draft position statements upholding the Navajo Nation's position and response to the Trump Administration and federal agencies.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) said Diné citizens, as well as other Native American tribes, have had ties to the land for time immemorial and have unique cultures and languages that have been present before the time of colonization in the Americas.

“Navajo people have their own language and way of life, and we have strong ties to our ancestral land areas within our four sacred mountains. Perhaps we need to demand that the United States pay their debt for living in our traditional land areas,” said Delegate Brown. “We need to remind our congressional leaders and federal agencies that we are a sovereign entity and we have treaty rights.”

Delegate Brown stressed that treaties with the federal government are considered the “supreme law of the land” by federal statute, and should be upheld by the federal government to adhere to their trust responsibilities and ensure that direct services are not interrupted for Native people, and that they recognize the Navajo Nation as a governmental entity, not a racial group.

HEHSC members voted 4-0 to approve Legislation No. 0152-18. The Naabik’íyáti’ Committee serves as the final authority on the bill.

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