



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Legislation seeking to change the “Navajo Nation” to “Diné Nation” tabled pending further evaluation

WINDOW ROCK – On the last day of the 2017 Winter Council Session, the Council tabled Legislation No. 0395-16 until the Spring Council Session in April. The bill seeks to amend the Navajo Nation Code to change the name of the “Navajo Nation” to “Diné Nation.”

Following nearly two hours of discussion, legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) agreed to the tabling motion to allow more time for the Navajo people to discuss and consider the name change.

“The intent of the legislation was to question how we identify ourselves. Then we question ourselves as Council Delegates, should this question be up to the Navajo people or the legislators? We also need to hear what our people think about this,” stated Delegate Hale.

Delegate Hale also pointed out that the legislation received no public comments during the five-day comment period.

Title II of the NNC provides a five-day comment period for the Navajo Nation Executive Branch, chapter governments, and the public to provide comments to legislations that will be considered by the Navajo Nation Council Standing Committees and Council.

“If we change the Nation’s name to ‘Diné Nation’, how much will it cost? Where will the money come from to make the change?” questioned Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. (Shonto, Naa’tsis’Áán, Oljato, Ts’ah Bii Kin), referring to changes that would have to be made to supplies, equipment, etc.

“Also, many of our local chapter governments have changed their names to Navajo translated names but majority of the public still use the old names. For example, Navajo Mountain Chapter changed their name to ‘Naa’tsis’Áán Chapter,’ but people still identify the chapter as Navajo Mountain. Our Navajo people are use to the name ‘Navajo,’” added Delegate Daniels.

In support of the legislation, Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) stated that the name change would allow the people to properly identify themselves as “Diné.”

“It may be true that we are known as ‘Navajo’ to the world but how do we identify ourselves in prayers? We identify ourselves as ‘Diné’ in front of the Holy People. The word ‘Navajo’ is a generic term that was given to us by the federal government. We constantly tell our children to learn the language and culture and allowing the name change will be a first step to revitalizing our language,” stated Delegate Brown.

According to Delegate Brown, many people interpret the word, “Diné,” as “The People,” but some Council members were concerned that the word “Diné” may associate with different meanings and interpretations.

“For example, the word ‘Diné’ may translate into ‘The People’ or refer to a male,” said Delegate Daniels.

After a lengthy debate among Council members, the Council approved a tabling motion by Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) to allow more time for consideration.

“The legislation arises many questions. I believe that we need insight from the elders, chapters, and youth. We also need clear recommendations and explanation of the word ‘Diné,’” stated Delegate Begay.

The legislation states that if the change is approved it would go into effect in Oct. 2017 to allow time to plan and implement the name change.

Public comments in reference to Legislation No. 0395-16 can be submitted as follows:

- Digital comments may be e-mailed to: comments@navajo-nsn.gov
- Written comments may be mailed to: Executive Director, Office of Legislative Services, P.O. Box 3390, Window Rock, AZ 86515
- Written comments may be faxed to: Fax #: (928) 871-7259

The Council approved to table the legislation until the Spring Council Session in April to hold a work session.

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