



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council approves referendum to allow Navajo people to determine fluency issue

Resolution sent to President Shelly for consideration

WINDOW ROCK—The Navajo Nation Council on Friday approved legislation to hold a public referendum to allow the Navajo people to determine language fluency qualifications for the positions of president and vice president.

Legislation No. 0010-15 sponsored by Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) originally requested \$317,000 to fund the presidential election scheduled by the Navajo Election Administration for April 21.

In his opening remarks, Delegate Witherspoon asked his colleagues to support the legislation to bring an end to the divisiveness created by the fluency issue.

During the discussion, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) proposed an amendment calling for the funding to be used to hold a referendum prior to the election.

The amendment states, “This appropriation shall first be used to have the Navajo voters vote on the referendum question to modify 11 N.N.C.,” which outlines qualifications for the office of the president and vice president.

In addition, the amendment calls for a special session to be held to address the presidential election following the certification of the referendum vote by the Navajo Election Administration.

Delegate Witherspoon argued that the amendment would change the intent of the legislation. However, Council supported the amendment with a vote of 12-8.

Prior to the final vote, Delegate Tsosie called for an increase in support for language immersion programs and stated that the legislation would give the authority back to the Navajo people to decide the issue.

“The people are the best decision makers on a tough issue like this,” stated Delegate Tsosie. “What we’ve done is given the authority back to the people.”

The Council resolution has been sent to the Office of the President and Vice President. President Shelly will have ten calendar days to consider the resolution.

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